HIGH WINDS

by

ARTHUR TRAIN

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BY ARTHUR TRAIN

NOVELS

HIGH WINDS
THE BLIND GODDESS
THE NEEDLE'S EYE
HIS CHILDREN'S CHILDREN
THE GOLDFISH
THE EARTHQUAKE
THE WORLD AND THOMAS KELLY
THE CONFESSIONS OF ARTEMAS QUIBBLE
"C. Q."—IN THE WIRELESS HOUSE
THE BUTLER'S STORY

STORIES

THE LOST GOSPEL
AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING
TRUE STORIES OF CRIME
McALLISTER AND HIS DOUBLE
MORTMAIN

ABOUT MR. TUTT

PAGE MR. TUTT
TUT, TUT! MR. TUTT
TUTT AND MR. TUTT
BY ADVICE OF COUNSEL
THE HERMIT OF TURKEY HOLLOW

ESSAYS ON LAW AND LAWYERS

ON THE TRAIL OF THE BAD MEN
THE PRISONER AT THE BAR
COURTS, CRIMINALS, AND THE CAMORRA

HIGH WINDS

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By ARTHUR TRAIN

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TO

MABEL COCHRAN

JUL - 1 1949

"Revision does not mean mere destruction. We can often say to tradition: That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die. But we can sometimes see in the world of opinion a sort of resurrection of the dead,—a resurrection wherein what was indeed justly sown in dishonor is raised in honor,—glorified,—and perhaps incorruptible. Let us bury the natural body of tradition. What we want is its glorified body and its immortal soul."

—Josiah Royce, "The Philosophy of Loyalty."

FOREWORD

URSULA WEYBRIDGE and her sister Enid had been born in that epoch of social metamorphosis when girls were beginning to abandon the rocking-chair on the hotel piazza for the tennis-court. People hummed airs from "Pinafore" and "The Mikado"; the safety bicycle was a novelty; John L. Sullivan and Chauncey M. Depew were accepted institutions; the new Scotch game of golf was regarded as ridiculous; Mrs. William Astor was the *dea ex machina* of a society whose temple was 840 Fifth Avenue; men still attended divine service; cocktails in private houses were unknown.

America was still one hundred per cent American and ninety-nine per cent pure. Even during the Yellow Nineties, supposedly regarded as so *decadent* and "*fin de siecle*," we refused to look upon life save through rose-tinted glasses. Charles Dana Gibson and Richard Harding Davis had popularized as the national hero a clean-shaven, square-shouldered young Galahad who, as drawn by Gibson, strangely resembled Davis; and, as the ideal of American girlhood, a balloon-sleeved, wasp-waisted Venus in a rakish straw hat, easily recognizable as Irene Langhorne. It was a romantic era in which everybody engaged in a conspiracy of pure-mindedness. The word *decadent* was familiar as applied to the works of Aubrey Beardsley and Oscar Wilde; French novels were found only behind sofa cushions; Stevenson had yet to put into print the first Goddamn; legs were not referred to; childbirth was spoken of in whispers, if at all;—Queen Victoria was on the throne.

A period of disillusionment followed. The "Victorian Era" came to be looked upon as the "Age of Bunk." We discovered sinners in high office and corruption everywhere. Fortunes were made in muck. Roosevelt threw his sombrero into the ring and in stentorian tones challenged the malefactors of great wealth. The cities bowed their heads with shame, and Miss Ida Tarbell, by her exposition of the iniquities of Standard Oil, succeeded in driving John D. Rockefeller out of the counting-room and on to the golf-course.

A few young Davids like Jerome and Lindsey attacked the Goliaths of corruption with the sling of honesty; while a thousand others who wished to "give their lives to service" by administering public office sprang forward armed with mud balls. The Samson of Reform grasped the pillars of Faith and Reverence in his strong young hands and shook the Temple of National Confidence. The torch of iconoclasm flickered over everything alike—exposing in turn the weaknesses and delinquencies of politics, society, big business, organized philanthropy, marriage, theology, and the Constitution. Principles were judged by personalities and crashed with those who preached them. No one was safe. Even the virtue of the Goddess of Liberty fell momentarily under suspicion, while capital cowered behind the threadbare protection of an economic system challenged as outworn.

Meanwhile Thorstein Veblen amiably explained the theory of the leisure class; and the leisure class of Russian Poland patronizingly accepted our invitation to come over and live with us as the authorized arbiters of art, literature, and music. One could not be fashionable without being radical. Wealth and Socialism kissed each other; and for a fleeting moment the Have-nots and the Haves lay down together on upper Fifth Avenue. The

drama became all sicklied o'er with a pale cast of Semiticism. Every social leader had her pet Jew. The walls of Greenwich Village were restored by Philistines chattering of symbolism, cubes, and planes. The honk of the motor drowned the sound of the church bell; the choir boy turned caddy; and the children, having eaten of the grapes of sophistication, set the parents' teeth on edge by boldly questioning the sincerity of the Ten Commandments and the marriage service.

The war saved the Constitution: it also forced a showdown on Sex. Pretense was no longer possible; there were no more inhibitions. The injunction to "be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever" ceased to appeal to a younger generation fully aware that if one could be clever it was unnecessary to be good; and who regarded with derision, if not with pity, fathers and mothers who must needs be virtuous when virtue was no longer a reward.—An uneasy moment for the Pilgrim Fathers!

HIGH WINDS

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CHAPTER I

All night long the frogs had shrilled in the meadow at the foot of the garden,—at first in an expectant trill of silver like the pulsation of distant sleigh-bells, then in a prolonged fierce scream as dynamic as the whine of a turbine; and now that Ursula was awake she missed something, for they had stopped with the daylight; by autumn their call would have ceased forever.

Already the room was too hot and getting up she leaned out of the window possessed by a restless consciousness of having something important to do, although she could not remember what it was. From the ridge across the river the sun was just spraying the valley with a creeping barrage of gold. In place of the ghostly landscape of last night a flooded, fecund world beckoned to her. Bright yellow sectored with bronze marked the overflowing stream; the black fields were smeared with green, lines of blue showing where the flush ditches could no longer feed the oozing soil. The orchard was white with blossoms stained with pink, and alive with squabbling birds. From the garden came the murmur of insects. The air had a heavy sweetness as of honey, tinctured now and then by a whiff of fertilizer or a jab of ammonia from the stable-yard. The womb of the earth was tight to bursting. Involuntarily Ursula pressed her hands to her breasts.

At that instant Jim Curry, the hired man, came out of the cow-house carrying a frothing pail in each hand.

Tanned to a dull red, his figure was that of a Roman athlete carved from porphyry. She had never noticed before how lightly he carried himself, letting the pails hang from his shoulders without effort. "How strong he must be!" she thought. "I wonder how old he is. He can't be over twenty."

She turned to her cheval-glass. Surely she didn't look thirty-nine! Thirty-five, perhaps. She lifted the heavy blond tresses from her forehead and ran her fingers through them. No, not a single gray hair! No crows-feet, either. Slowly she loosened the ribbon of her night-gown and studied her torso in the mirror. Everything about her was round and full—smooth white—lovely!

"I'm not old!" she protested. "Age has to show somehow! I've not a sign of it!"

Then, hearing a familiar creak upon the stairs, she jumped back into bed.

"Breakfast, Miss Ursula!" The face of Bessie, her Scotch maid, with its border of sparse grayish hair, appeared in the doorway. "There was a wee calf born last night," said Bessie bringing in the tray. "Cook and I were just down to the barn for a look at it. A bonnie thing! Don't you think it a shame to take it from its mother?" There was a flutter in her voice, which the calf's somewhat premature arrival seemed hardly to warrant.

"Well, she'll have it to nurse for three days anyhow," replied Ursula philosophically, as she filled her coffee-cup. "That's better than nothing!—I think in your excitement over the calf you have forgotten the hot milk."

"Dearie me! So I have!"

There were tears in the gray eyes. Ursula was puzzled. She had never suspected any such capacity for emotion in the staid Scot.

"What's the matter, Bessie! You haven't had any bad news, I hope?"

"O no, Miss Ursula!"

The maid hastily lifted her apron as the tears welled over.

"Well, what is it, then?" asked Ursula gently.

"I've got to give you notice, Miss Ursula."

"Notice! Why, Bessie! You mustn't give notice. I can't get on without you!"

Bessie averted her face.

"I'm—going—to get married."

Ursula stared at her. The idea was preposterous,—a woman of that age! How annoying! That was the trouble with becoming dependent upon servants. She would never be able to find another maid like Bessie! But if she momentarily harbored any intention of trying to persuade Bessie to forego matrimony, it vanished before the radiance of the woman's smile.

"I know what you're thinking of, Miss Ursula! An' I don't blame you. I only received the letter from Fergus MacVane just ten minutes ago, telling me how he had got appointed postmaster at Scourie and that the salary, with what he had saved, would be enough. We've been engaged fifteen years, you see, miss!"

"Haven't you seen him in all that time, Bessie?"

"No, Miss Ursula, but we have written regular every month."

"But aren't you taking a great chance?" persisted her mistress. "How do you know what he's like? He may have changed a great deal."

"Fergus is a steady man, Miss Ursula. He doesn't change!"

"I know, but—fifteen years! And at your age! How old *are* you, Bessie?"

"I'm not so old, Miss Ursula. I'm only thirty-six."

A wave of envy swept over Ursula. Why should happiness be granted to this flat-chested little woman and denied to her? Bessie might even have babies—! How funny! Fancy Bessie an anxious mother! What romance could lie in an economic union of that sort? Yet they had been faithful to one another fifteen years! And now their fidelity was to have its reward. The maid's shrivelled figure as she bent to take away the tray had a strange dignity. Their eyes met at close range. Ursula put her arms impulsively about her neck and kissed her.

"I'm so glad for you, Bessie! It's quite wonderful! And how grand to be a postmaster's wife! I hope you'll be very, very happy! Your Fergus must be a good man —worth waiting for!"

Then, before they knew it, they both were crying.

"You'll be getting married yourself one of these days!" After the relief of disclosure and its concomitant outburst of affection Bessie uttered these words of encouragement with an infinitesimal note of superiority. Ursula repressed a smile.

"It is not likely that I shall ever marry, Bessie. You see nobody is waiting for *me!*"

"Maybe there is, at that! Only neither you nor he knows it!" replied Bessie as she backed out with the tray. "If God sends me a girl I'll call her 'Ursula,'" she added shyly.

Ursula dressed quickly and went down-stairs. She had made no plans for the day, as her favorite niece Gay Kent was staying with her, and she had assumed that they would have a game of golf together and perhaps lunch at the club. But a fresh annoyance was in store. Jimmy Thorne, Gay's best young man, had forestalled her.

"Hello, Ursula!" he called out, stalking in from the piazza, his broad shoulders pumping up and down after the manner of the walking-beam of a side-wheeler, as if in apology for their enormous size. "Hope you don't mind my stealing Gay off you!"

He grinned disarmingly as he engulfed Ursula's hand in his freckled paw.

"Jimmy's giving me golf lessons," explained Gay. "He says my style is improving."

"Then much is forgiven him!" said Ursula, pulling the girl down upon the settee beside her.

Her friendship with Gay touched the deepest springs in her nature. Instinctively antipathetic to her mother the girl had turned to her aunt, supplying for the latter's rare gift of affection a normal outlet without which she might have become really embittered. There wasn't a girl in her bunch, Gay alleged admiringly, that had half Ursula's "pep" or out of whose companionship she got anything like the same "kick."

Their physical resemblance was almost startling, for both were slender ash-blonds with the same veiled, lowering black eyes, wavy hair, short, straight nose, and full lips—a touch of the lioness in both. At fifty yards it was difficult to tell them apart, with their high, narrow shoulders and long, swinging stride. Close at hand the difference in years—but by no means the full difference—became apparent in Ursula's more rounded figure, the depth of her bosom, and the fine lines of character just beginning to show about her mouth and eyes, in contrast with which Gay's face was a mask of smooth marble. Both had warmth and a natural gaiety and the same deep husky voice and slow speech which so many men found irresistibly attractive. But while superficially Gay was the replica of her aunt, morally and intellec-

tually she was but a childish echo of her. To her mother she bore little resemblance in either face or character.

"By George!—but you two look alike!" exclaimed the boy, sighting at them along a mashie. "The only trouble with Gay is that she doesn't follow all the way through. She keeps her eye on the ball all right, and her head is steady as a rock, but—you've absolutely got to follow through!—I bet *you* do, Ursula!"

He illustrated, using the mashie as a driver.

"Look out or you'll smash the lamp!" warned Ursula.

"Sorry!" he apologized. "You'll forgive my running off with Gay, won't you?"

"Of course!" replied Ursula. "But I'm going over to the club myself, later. I'll probably see you there! —Give me a cigarette, please."

Jimmy took a large, golden box from his pocket.

"This wise little guy says the only way to find out anything about a man is on the golf-course. And I guess she's right. A girl has no chance to know anything about a chap she sees only at dances or the theatre. Any fellow can send a girl orchids."

"Not every fellow does," commented Gay dreamily.

"That's a nifty!" acknowledged her escort. "But I guess marriage is an even break. So far as I can see, most engaged couples spend their time fooling one another. Do you suppose they ever let on what they're really like until after the wedding breakfast?"

"Not unless they're morons!" murmured Gay.

"Well, they say we all are!" replied the truthful James. "I read how one judge said any one who wanted to get married was presumptively insane."

"It's a pure gamble!" Gay expelled a series of tiny smoke rings from her pursed lips by patting her cheek

rapidly with her forefinger. "I told Sheila Thayne she was marrying a dud, and she allowed that even if he wasn't so much, one chance was as good as another, that no marriage lasted more than five years nowadays, and she could stand him that long anyway."

"Gay!" cried Ursula. "How can you be so cold-blooded!"

Gay flushed.

"Well," she retorted, "it's so, isn't it? Take the people right in this neighborhood—the Blairs, the Carsons, the Duells, the Feltons, the Greers—I could go right through the alphabet—leaving out the Y's, X's, and Z's."

"What's the matter with the Yerkes and Zabriskies?" inquired James. "And Xanthos, the candy man, got a divorce—I read all about it. His wife ran away with a bootblack named Xenathes—double-crossed him, as it were!"

"Another nifty!" shrieked Gay. "Toss me a Dromedary, James Thorne! Well, the next time you ask me to marry you, I shall refuse!"

"Won't you allow me to make an honest woman of you?"

Ursula raised her hands.

"What children!"

"Oh, don't mind Jimmy!" said Gay. "He's famous for saying the most terrific things. Why, that's absolutely nothing—for him!"

Ursula wondered what under the circumstances Gay would regard as "something" for Jimmy to say. Still, wasn't it a hundred times better for girls and boys to be pals than always to be self-conscious about sex? Times changed—perhaps for the better. Surely this was more desirable than the starched conventionality

of her own girlhood—when puff sleeves and stiffly perched straws acted as bulwarks to familiarity.

Jimmy glanced at his wrist-watch.

"Well," said he, with a propitiatory smile at his hostess, "we ought to be toddling. Can't we give you a lift?"

Ursula knew better than to avail herself of the gesture.

"Thanks. I'll be along presently. I've got to give the new calf the once-over."

From the grass-grown flagstones of her terrace she watched them whir off in the roadster. Was he nice enough for her Gay? What was Gay—really? Was she anything more than a pretty girl with a gift for appearing clever, imbued with the breathless anxiety, characteristic of her entire generation, to make the most of her brief moment. Two squirrels scrambled squeaking up the elm trunk by the gate and rushed tandem from bough to bough. Well, perhaps these boys and girls were right! What was it made the world go 'round and turned it topsy-turvy?

"Isn't Ursula a dear!" said Gay, as they shot down the road.

"An absolute knockout!" agreed her companion. "You're going to be just like her. That's one reason I'm so crazy about her. Why hasn't she ever married?"

"Maybe she never fell in love."

"Well, I guess she could have married 'most anybody she wanted to. All the polo crowd were dippy about her—Jerry Brookfield, both the Longwoods, Dick Darcy—every one! She laid 'em cold in rows!"

"She's got too much brain for a polo player," declared Gay.

"'Is zat so?'" inquired Jimmy with sarcasm.

"I said it! And I'm a polo player's daughter! Ursula's too clever for most men. They're scared of her.

I don't suppose any man wants his wife to know that he's a bonehead—and the usual run are."

"Appreciation from my sex!" bowed James politely.

"Well, can you see her falling for anything in white flannel that smells of Bull Durham and bay rum? Another thing, Ursula's almost too beautiful, too distinguished. You know she made a whale of a hit in London the year she was presented. You've seen the photograph of her, haven't you—in the ostrich plumes?"

He nodded.

"The one on the library table."

"I guess it frightens 'em off. They can't imagine what a brilliant woman like her could see in them and so they don't even try to find out."

"It doesn't keep off the foreigners," he grunted. "It makes me sick how our girls fall for those measly little shrimps. Will you tell me why they do it?"

"For one thing, the foreigners send the orchids."

"And charge 'em to the girl's dad!" he added.

"Very likely. But they send them! That's the point. A foreigner—take Prince Lorsky for instance—never gives the girl time to think. Rushes her off her feet. Tells you he loves you—'je t'adore' rather—the first time he meets you and keeps telling you three times a day until he gets you or you give him the ice-pick. They know how, they have time, and they make a business of it. It's all the difference between an amateur and a professional."

"I adore you—I love you—and I've told you so three times a day for six months!" Jimmy turned insinuatingly toward the blond head.

"Rotten!" groaned Gay. "Take a few lessons from Lorsky. No doubt he'd be glad to give them to you for three dollars an hour!"

"Well, I hope Ursula won't marry him."

"She won't. She's had her pick of English army officers, Italian noblemen, French poets and diplomats, and turned 'em all down. All the same, if she waits for the perfect man she'll never get him. There's no such animal. Maybe she doesn't want to marry. She's got a lovely house, plenty of good beaux, and has a wonderful time wherever she goes. It would take something pretty good to make it worth her while to change. But at that, perhaps she's too fastidious!"

They were just entering Glen Cove.

"Well, don't get too fastidious yourself, dearie!"

"I don't give many signs of it, do I?" she mocked.

"Is that meant to be personal?"

"Ouch!"

"Goose!"

"Apache!"

"Hell-cat!"

He swerved sharply, narrowly missing a pedestrian.

"Look out! You nearly murdered that fat man!" then brightly over her shoulder—"Please excuse him, sir, he's just been discharged from Bloomingdale!"

With a sense of futility Ursula turned into the house. Life too had left her behind. She looked about the pretty sitting-room which so well expressed her personality—with its smiling chintz, its English prints, its billowy, upholstered furniture, its tea-table set with shining Georgian silver, its wide chimney with the cushioned fire seat and blackened crane, its crammed bookcases—and felt that it was all wasted. Had she been a fool not to marry? She could at least have had—if not love—a child!

The sun poured down upon the earth, melting the snows and filling the rivers, impregnating the fields,

swelling the buds until they burst into leaf and blossom, and all things animate throbbed with a like instinct to expand, to give back the warmth received, to create. At this, the supreme moment of the spring, the heart of Ursula Weybridge was sending forth an unconscious call such as it had never sent before. It is the tragedy of human life, that when that call goes forth the right instrument is so rarely in tune, as it might easily be, and that the throbbings of two hearts made for each other do not at the moment synchronize, so that years may pass before they find one another, if indeed they ever do.

"Oh, dear! I don't want to play golf!" cried Ursula. "What do I want?"

The day passed stupidly. Ursula had made no engagement except to dine with her sister Enid that evening, and, although she could easily enough have invited herself to lunch with Diana Maitland, or a dozen others, she felt too dispirited to make the effort. Something was wrong with her life. Even her work in the garden that she loved bored her; for beyond the clustering bells of columbine and lupine, the flowering hawthorns and pink crab-apples, she was conscious of a lonely road leading "along the downward slope of years." It was really too hot to do anything—even to read.

In the shadow of the vines of the summer-house the air was stifling; outside one caught on fire. Relief came toward sunset. Ursula, lying in a wicker deck-chair with her book in her lap, fell fast asleep, her right cheek resting against the cushions, one hand extended and showing the white richness of her skin below the sunburn.

She lay like a beautiful discontented child, her lips slightly parted and pouting, her thick lashes sweeping her flushed cheeks, her piled-up tawny hair forced for-

ward and almost tumbling. She breathed deeply; the thin muslin stretched tight against her full bosom as it rose and fell, her crossed legs disclosing the high arches of her slender feet and the graceful contours of her thighs. A woman ripe for love, the soul submerged for the moment in mere carnal beauty, exhaling an impalpable fragrance.

The sun was gilding the crests of the elms and the lawn was already beginning to exude its evening dampness when a step crunched upon the gravel outside the arbor. Ursula, lifting drowsy lids to the embarrassed face of Jim Curry, sat up hastily and adjusted her dress.

"Excuse me, Miss Weybridge. I didn't mean to disturb you, but do you want the car this evening?"

"Didn't I tell you? How stupid of me! I want it at a quarter past seven."

"It's seven already."

"Seven! Impossible!" she exclaimed. "Well, I shall have to hurry! But I shan't need you. I'll drive myself." Her rest and the lowered temperature had tended to restore her spirits. Jim stood aside to let her pass and watched her admiringly as she ran across the lawn and into the house.

"Darned if I didn't think she was Miss Gay at first!" he commented.

CHAPTER II

It was already half past seven—the Kents' dinner-hour—when Ursula came down-stairs in her dust-coat and got into her roadster. It would take her a good thirty minutes to reach "The Mews" and she knew that Enid, who enjoyed showing others their unimportance, would not wait for her.

From the shrubbery about the house came tentative inquiries and hesitant answerings—the mellow interchange of song-sparrow and veery—from the grove in the pasture the deep arpeggio of the Canada thrush. A thin gray scarf was creeping along the ditches, spreading gently over the marsh whence once more was beginning to arise the shrill syncopation that had penetrated her dreams the preceding night. Swallows flickered overhead. The stagnant pool across the road shone silver. Through the rose dusk two stars glimmered far apart.

"I wish I hadn't promised to go!" she thought as she threw in the clutch. "I'd rather have had dinner by myself!"

It was, however, the last time she would see her sister for several weeks, for Carter Blair, the president of the company of which her brother-in-law, Charles, was an officer, was taking her with him on his yacht *The Astarte*, together with Gay and Jimmy Thorne and a party of friends—not, however, including Charles—for a lengthy cruise. The way Enid calmly deserted her husband did not altogether please Ursula, and she vaguely felt that her sister might lay herself open to criticism owing to

such repeated absences. Still, nobody ever did seem to criticise Enid. And she always had a dozen safeguards. Ursula was very fond of her in spite of the fact that they were so different and led such separate lives.

"Folly Farm" topped a rise, a mile or so inland from Long Island Sound, in a somewhat less fashionable section than the property of her sister Enid, which, although equally small, was situated upon the water about twelve miles distant. But, while "Folly Farm" was really a farm, "The Mews" was a "place," tucked away between millionaire estates. Charles had bought it for a song in his earlier polo-playing days from Jerry Brookfield, who wanted to have him near at hand, before motors and airplanes had made Long Island into a single social community, and, with the aid of a smart English butler, had managed to entertain there with quite an air on a ridiculously small income. To be asked down to Charlie Kent's for the week-end, in an epoch when ownership in Long Island real estate was the exception rather than the rule, was distinctly the thing. In fact, Charles managed so well that most people assumed him to be a rich man. Enid had been one of these and it had been a shock to her to find, after they were married, that he could no longer afford to keep up his stable and at the same time maintain her in what the church referred to as "that state of life into which it hath pleased God to call" her. Kent, who was honestly in love with Enid, gave up his ponies without rancor, but Enid never escaped a smouldering resentment because they could not do everything they wanted to.

There was nothing mercenary about Charles, which may have accounted in part for his lack of ambition, and his popularity as a polo-player had destroyed any that he might otherwise have had, since it led him to

regard himself as a person to whom society owed a permanent debt. In this he can hardly be blamed, when it is remembered that he scored most of the goals against the English team in 1902, and was featured as one of the world's leading sportsmen in every newspaper on two continents. He had been greatly taken up in England and could have spent several years, had he so chosen, in visiting from country house to country house, and still not have outstayed his welcome. Thus it was natural that he should have vaguely looked forward to the same condition of affairs all his life, and that Enid, lured by the glamour of his dashing reputation, should have expected the same thing for herself. But Kent the young bachelor sport was one thing and Kent the middle-aged married business man was quite another.

He had never boasted of having much "above the eyebrows," but with his retirement from the polo-field he began to have plenty "below the belt." He had been a great "forward" but it became speedily apparent that he would never be anything else. Enid, clinging tenaciously to the past and encouraging the fiction that Charles was still a sportsman, salvaged something from the wreck of her ambitions—while striving unsuccessfully to keep down her servants' appetites—by forcing herself insistently upon his former friends and never allowing anybody to forget that he had once stayed with the royal family at Sandringham. It was not long before she acquired the art of being mean to Charles with his own money. They had three children in quick succession, and then their married life, as such, ceased. Charles more or less retired to the club. Enid accused him of drinking and—without basis—of going with other women, but her real grievance was that he had not enough money. Pensioned off by Brookfield as assistant treas-

urer of the great Calizona Copper Company, it would have been far better for her as well as for him if he had had a much smaller salary and had had to work for it. He greatly admired Enid, and respected her cleverness. She could have brought him back to her any time she wished, but saw no reason for doing so. She was still pretty, socially ambitious, and with a zest for enjoyment and, while their means were not large according to the scale of Long Island expenditure, she could still afford to entertain in moderation.

But as Charles grew ruddier and more portly, and his eyes more watery, she detected a falling off in the number and urgency of their invitations. She often heard that Ursula went to places to which she and Charles had not been asked. It was not what she had looked forward to. She had expected him to be pushed rapidly along until he was at least first vice-president with a large, if not colossal, salary—a private car, and all the importance that surrounds one of the chief executives of a great industry. She saw now that she had been foolish to look forward to any such thing. Charles had been "taken care of," that was all. Under these circumstances a husband was a social liability, not an asset. Nevertheless, it never occurred to her to leave him, since she had been brought up in an era when divorce was not regarded as respectable. She merely changed her room and adjusted herself to the facts with a certain relief.

Like the other women of her generation she had a high regard for convention, and greatly valued all the established features of the social order to which she owed whatever it was that she had. She was active at St. Timothy's, which she attended regularly on Sundays during the season and twice a week in Lent, and its deservedly popular pastor, the Reverend Roderick Thrum,

was by way of being an intimate of the house. She even encouraged the fiction that he was a friend of long standing, liked his way of calling her "dear lady" and taking her hand tenderly in both of his when he came to tea. His rosily impeccable presence gave, she felt, a certain *cachet* to her dinner parties, just as did that of Mr. Vincent Pepperill, the fragile and distinguished old attorney for the Calizona. Thrum supplied character, and Pepperill—for he was a genuine swell of the old school—a touch of smartness. In all of which Enid but showed a proper respect for state and church, since she got protection from the one and expected to achieve salvation through the other.

The truth was that like thousands of women of her class she led a life of luxurious indolence, performing vicariously all her duties but one, from which she now insisted on being relieved. Her servants ran her house to suit themselves, and did it exceedingly well. Nurses and governesses had nurtured and educated her offspring far better than she ever could have done.

Regarding the situation dispassionately, she had the advantage over some of her less fortunate sisters in being sure of her job. Indeed, she did not need a man to support her, since she had money of her own. She was without emotions but her very coldness had for some men a lure. As Bob Morgan said, she was "ice-cream with hot chocolate sauce." Unlike her sister she was a brunette, more delicately built and with blue eyes—something of the Watteau type. She had got nothing out of her marriage with Kent because she had put nothing into it, and she luxuriated in "the tragedy of her life," which she felt had been thrown away. Nevertheless, she looked down on Ursula as an unmarried woman.

"Of course, dear, we knew you didn't want us to wait!" she said as Ursula entered the Kents' dining-room shortly before eight. "You know everybody, I think. Shall I have Walton bring you a plate of soup or——"

"Oh, I'm not hungry. I'll just hop onto the next dish as it comes along!" answered Ursula, taking the vacant place between her brother-in-law and Carter Blair, the president of the Calizona. "I haven't done a thing all day. How are you, Carter?"

She glanced around the candle-lit table as the men sat down again. Besides Blair and herself there were three other guests—all of them men—of whom she recognized two, the Reverend Roderick Thrum and Mr. Robert Morgan, an elderly philandering architect whose reputation for being dangerous gave him extraordinary popularity and even greater opportunities. The other, who sat at Enid's right, she could not see owing to an intervening candlestick.

"Who's that?" she asked of Blair.

"Peter McKay," he answered, "our general manager out at Oxide. Got him off the Zimmerman crowd. One of the best engineers in the business. He's on here doing his Eastern bit. We keep shifting our executives forward and back, you know. You've probably heard Charles speak of him."

"Perhaps. I don't remember," she replied. "So many come here."

"Mining men don't seem to interest you," he grumbled. "They're all right, Ursula. Why don't you consider me as a possible candidate?"

They were on familiar terms, not only owing to the family business relation but to the fact that Blair was a near neighbor of the Kents and constantly at the house.

"Done nothing all day?" Enid quickly picked up the conversation. "Why didn't you do something exciting on your birthday?"

Ursula flushed. It was mean of Enid to refer to her birthday before strangers.

"I don't have birthdays any more! No woman ought to after—what shall I say?—thirty-five?"

"Why not say thirty-five?" replied Enid sweetly.

"I don't know how old the child is," ruminated Morgan, regarding Ursula under arched brows, "but she doesn't look a day over twenty!"

"Why didn't you tell me it was Ursula's birthday, Enid?" protested Charles in a loud voice. "We ought to drink her health! We shall drink her health! What's the use of having a beautiful sister-in-law unless you can drink her health, eh, Thrum?" He began fumbling in his pocket. "Here, Walton. Go down and get out a bottle of the Krug."

Ursula saw Enid look appealingly at Blair.

"It will be no good, Charlie," remarked the latter. "A glass of claret of the right temperature is better than warm champagne. Besides, we don't want to wait!"

The Reverend Thrum cleared his throat and, regarding Ursula benignly, arose to his feet holding a glass of whiskey-and-soda.

"Er—I cannot refrain—" he began.

"Hear! Hear!" from Charles, also reaching for his glass.

"I cannot surrender the privilege, upon which I must insist as an old friend and spiritual adviser of Miss Weybridge's father—and, I may add of the entire family—of proposing the health upon this, her birthday, of the most beautiful, the most talented, and most virtuous

lady not yet a member of my flock—Miss Ursula Weybridge!"

They all arose and Ursula found herself looking into the eyes of the man opposite. Their expression was gentle and friendly,—rather sad, she thought, as was that of the whole lean Norman face.

"He's lonely!" she said to herself. "I know just how he feels!" and for some reason forgot everything but that she was sorry for his loneliness. Peter McKay. A nice name! And he looked such a nice man!

Once more the candlesticks hid his face. Blair finished what he had started to say about McKay. "Got him off the Zimmerman crowd," he repeated "—single-track sort of chap—at times obstinate. But he's got the nerve, all right." When the Wabblies had tried to rush the palisade around the Old Glory crushers during the big strike in '21, intending to flood the mine, McKay with a half-dozen men had held them off for seventy-two hours, without food or drink. He had saved the Calizona at least a million! Good chap!

Ursula was just wondering what salary this apparently invaluable man received as compared with Carter Blair's when the door of the pantry swung open and Walton entered, bearing a birthday cake blazing with candles. Ursula feebly tried to simulate delight. Enid might have spared her that last touch! In fact the candles seemed to have been carefully arranged so as to make computation easy and to leave no doubt as to their exact number.

Ursula, almost ready to cry, forced a note of gaiety into her voice as she turned in pseudo-protest to her sister.

"But Enid, dear, I'm not forty—I'm only thirty-nine!"

Enid gave her a honied smile.
"One to grow on, Ursula darling!"

Coffee was served upon the lawn which sloped down to the bay, now an undulating golden welter beneath the moon. A wisp of lavender smoke above an edge of smouldering gray was all that was left of the sunset. Ursula was curiously excited. In the conflicting half-light the faces of those about her seemed to take on a mysterious luminosity. Her sister was talking with Carter Blair; Charles, Thrum, and Morgan had gathered comfortably together about a wicker table covered with glasses and bottles. Instinctively looking for McKay she found him standing beside her.

"I hope it isn't too late for me to add my congratulations, Miss Weybridge?" he said with an obvious attempt to be polite, although his words were aloes on her open wound.

Her composure unexpectedly deserted her. "Don't be ridiculous!" she admonished herself, trying to gain control of her fluttering nerves.

"Not for this once!" she laughed. "But after this I'm not going to have any more birthdays. I hate growing old."

"Oh!—But you're not!—You don't look thirty," he floundered helplessly, obviously aware that he was making matters worse. "Honestly, years don't count—for anything. What I mean is—time hasn't any real significance."

His distress at his own gaucherie aroused her compassion and she hastened to lend him a friendly hand.

"Fifty years of Europe worth a cycle of Cathay?"

"I guess that's about it!"

"But suppose you can't get away from Cathay.?"

Her encouragement gave him tongue. They were both doing much better.

"It's what you are, not where you are, that counts," he answered slowly. "I imagine Cathay and Europe are both inside of you. You can take your choice. My old mother has never been farther than a hundred miles from her home in Woodstock, Vermont, while I've lived all over the lot—Mongolia, Burmah, the Transvaal, Australia, Arizona—yet that old woman knows more about everything than I ever hope to. She's keen as mustard, 'spry' as they say up there; at sixty-nine she's ten years younger than I am!——"

"That makes you about seventy-nine, doesn't it?"

The feeble joke was an excuse for the laugh that put them on easy terms.

"You can take exactly forty-seven years off that—or, if you're not good at mental arithmetic——"

"Which I'm not!" she admitted.

"I'll confess to thirty-two. Only don't tell Mr. Blair or he might cut my salary! He's never asked me my age.—Mind if I smoke a pipe?"

Even in the moonlight he looked far older than that —ten years older, she insisted to herself. She watched while he took a soiled chamois bag from one pocket of his well-cut Tuxedo coat and a short stubby pipe from the other. Then, as he struck a match:

"The trouble with me," he said simply, "is that I've never had a decent education."

He made this announcement with an almost pathetic detachment. Certainly, she thought, he did not give any such impression. His English was, on the whole, as good as that of most of the men she knew and his enunciation far better. With his wiry build and his strongly intellectual features he might have passed for the bow-oar

of an English university eight, in spite of the slight uneven hunch of his shoulders, due, she decided, to his years in the saddle. A small jagged scar between mouth and chin gave a slightly whimsical twist to his expression that occasionally left one in doubt as to whether he was smiling or not. But he was certainly smiling now.

"I've lived a fairly rough life!" he explained as the match shrivelled.

"Experience is supposed to be the best teacher. You've certainly travelled enough!"

"Yes, but not so much as you'd think. Of course there is considerable just getting to distant places, but afterward it's apt to be hard work right in the same spot. You may lay off for a day's shooting now and then, but usually there's nobody to talk to except Chinks or niggers. That's what gets you—having nobody to talk to!"

"But—you have books?" she protested.

He shook his head.

"There aren't many circulating libraries in Siam or the Gobi. You can swap with some other chap occasionally, but mostly you read over what you've got. You'd be surprised, I guess, at the book I read most. No, I don't mean the Bible—although the Bible is a great book. The one I read over and over again is Wynwood Reade's 'Martyrdom of Man.'"

She was surprised. A curious taste for a man like him.

"Yes, it is a wonderful book," she agreed; "but rather a depressing one, isn't it?"

"Not to me. It's life. You can't kick about life; anyhow it's a fool thing to deceive yourself about it. I like Reade because I get so much information out of him. I've no culture in the ordinary sense. It's like having a

highly intelligent and well-informed visitor.—I've lived by myself for months on end."

"You must have been very lonely!" said Ursula impulsively.

"I've tried not to let myself be!" he replied. "I've usually been too tired. Running a mine takes about all one's time."

"But the evenings?"

"Well, I've usually had to work evenings, too. There are so many things you can't attend to in the daytime —odds and ends to clean up—desk work. Of course, every man has his dreams." He took several puffs, then confidentially: "I've always looked forward to having a pretty young wife and a snug little home of my own, but this knocking around doesn't give you much chance to meet any girls. Then too, my salary hasn't always been what you'd call colossal, although now it's nearly top dog, as salaries go— That moonlight is fine, isn't it!"

The moonlight lost its magic for Ursula. So that was his dream! A pretty young wife—a sugary, doll-faced girl such as smirked at one from calendars and chocolate boxes!—A snug little home! She could see it out on the hill at Oxide! Why didn't he add a radio and a talking-machine? And a pattern magazine to cut the babies' dresses from? No wonder "The Martyrdom of Man" was his favorite book! He must not throw himself away like that! She would teach him to want something better.

What a delight it would be to take the clay of his simple nature and mould it into something sensitive and discriminating!

The other guests had drifted off toward the house. The lawn was deserted. From its foot near by, a scintil-

lating moon-path led out across the bay. The night was so still that distant sounds were clearly audible,—the creak of oars, the squawk of a heron, the prolonged shriek of a train on the Connecticut shore. One lonely peeper chirped in vain beside the lily-pond. From the beach came the whisper of the tide. Her heart seemed to expand.

"Listen!" said Ursula lifting her hand. "Do you hear the waves?" And inverting the verses, she quoted:

" 'I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore.' "

"That is exactly like to-night," he agreed. " 'Low sounds by the shore'! What is it from?"

"Yeats' 'Innisfree.' Don't you know it?

" 'I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;
Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnets' wings.' "

"Great stuff!" she heard him saying through the mist of the moonlight. "I wish I knew more of that sort of thing!"

"Let us go down to the water," she said in a voice which though husky did not seem like hers.

At the edge of the beach they paused, watching in silence the long curl of the silver lash as it lazily whipped

the shore. Both felt the spell, fearful lest they should break it. Her whole being was responding to vibrations wholly new to her experience. To their left the lawn jutted out into the bay, in a small tree-clad promontory. Without speaking, Ursula turned and took the path that led there. What she was doing seemed absolutely unreal to her. He followed. Like two ghosts moving in veils of light they passed among the trees without a sound.

He was so close to her that she imagined she could hear the beating of his heart. Why had she brought him there? Had it been merely to prevent the hostile spying upon them of unfriendly or too curious eyes—a wholly natural desire for privacy? Or had she done so in answer to some primordial instinct, like that which leads the mating doe to seek the covert? Had she gone crazy? What would he think? Might he not fairly assume that it was an invitation to some sort of intimacy? She knew that in spite of all her natural reserves she hoped he would—that if he allowed her to pass beyond the shadows of those black tree-trunks to the open moonlight again without some sign, the evening would be incomplete.

They were coming out now upon the point and the path tended slightly upward. Involuntarily she slackened her pace, blind and deaf to everything except his nearness. Would he—? How foolish of her! They were not children! She had known him less than two hours, had never been introduced to him. Yet— She had never been drawn thus to any man before. Then she grew faint, as she felt his hand upon her arm and heard him mutter something!

Lost as she was in a delirium of sensation caused by his mere touch, the word held no significance for her.

She stopped and his arm tightened about her as her body swayed against his. She could feel his breath upon her hair as she let her head sink upon his shoulder and closed her eyes, awaiting his caress. Not that she cared particularly! She was perfectly, blissfully, happy for the moment as she was. But after what was, in fact, only a moment's hesitation he took her more closely in his arms, bent, and kissed her upon the cheek. She gave a deep sigh and instinctively turned her face upward. This time he crushed her to him and kissed her again, violently.

No one could have been more astonished than McKay himself at what had occurred. His sudden exclamation, his restraining gesture upon Ursula's arm had been made solely for the purpose of distracting her attention from the disconcerting apparition of a man and woman closely embraced, upon the edge of the moonlight not thirty feet away. They were standing motionless, making a single shadow between the tree-trunks, his lips pressed passionately to hers and forcing her head back limply so that the moonlight fell white upon her face.

And then as he looked more intently he had perceived to his amazement that they were none other than his hostess and Carter Blair! Completely engrossed, they would have been oblivious to the approach of others far less silent than that of Ursula and her companion. It was to prevent her realization of their identity and also to permit of their escape that he had taken her by the arm with such unexpected consequences. Doubtless many a soul has found hell or heaven by similar mischance.

The result upon his mind was naturally complicated, and he could hardly be blamed for wondering whether moonlight had this invariable effect upon the female

members of this family. For Ursula it was an encouraging adventure after the successive stabs she had received from the Machiavellian Enid. Her sentimental yielding under the mystery of shadow and moonlight to what she believed his temporary impulse could hardly, she tried to convince herself, lower her in his eyes. He could not think the less of her for that! And yet she was worried because she now realized that his good opinion mattered so much to her.

Her world had become completely upset by going out to dinner at Enid's!—a thousand times more so than if she had been nineteen instead of thirty-nine. To be hugged in the moonlight was not necessarily a thrilling incident in the *après-midi d'une jeune fille;* but to be clasped in the arms of an athletic stranger and kissed fervently upon one's thirty-ninth birthday opened endless vistas. Did this young Lochinvar feel anything of the strange lure that for some inexplicable reason he had for her? Or had he taken her in his arms simply on general principles? He did not seem like that sort of man. Indeed, he struck her as peculiarly unsophisticated. Yet there had been nothing particularly unsophisticated about his kiss!

Nevertheless, he showed no desire to trespass further upon their relationship. On the contrary, he walked along beside her as if embarrassed at his own temerity and debating some sort of apology or explanation. If he offered one, she felt that she could not bear it! After all—! It was nothing! She almost wished Enid had been there to see, after her nastiness about the cake! Thirty-nine? She began to laugh nervously. There *was* something funny about it! Over the clump of beeches on the point the moon wore an amused expression.

"Please don't laugh at me!" McKay spoke humbly.

"I'm not laughing at you!" she answered gaily. "I'm laughing at myself!"

"But I—I really didn't mean—" he began. "You see——"

"Don't spoil it! There's nothing to apoiogize for. It—it was just—funny!"

Even without turning her head she was conscious of his altered attitude. What had she said? *Had* everything been spoiled already?

A tiny point of light, the aroma of a cigar, a voice:

"Hello! A grand night, isn't it? We ought to have fine weather for the cruise!" Blair stood waiting for them with studied unconsciousness upon the terrace. "I was just coming to look for you."

The three other men were still grouped on the veranda. Enid was nowhere to be seen, and Ursula at Blair's request rang for Walton and ordered the motor. Just as the good-nights were being said the hostess, crisp and diaphanously cool, came down-stairs. Ursula turned to McKay and gave him her hand.

"Won't you come to see me?" she asked.

His voice showed relief.

"You've only to tell me how to get there!"

"Then come to lunch to-morrow. It's Saturday. Charles can tell you how to find my farm. I'll give you some honey."

There was a battery of farewells, the gravel crunched under the wheels of the heavy limousine, and Charles, Enid, and Ursula were left standing alone.

Charles poured himself out a couple of inches of neat whiskey.

"Carter's a great fellow! They don't make many like him. He's only fifty-five! Just at the peak! I say,

Enid! Why didn't he invite Ursula to go on the cruise? Wouldn't she make a wonderful Mrs. Carter Blair?"

Enid uttered an exclamation of impatience.

"Don't be an idiot, Charles! Don't put such senseless ideas into circulation!"

"I'd like to see our pretty Ursula happily married to a man like Carter Blair!" exclaimed Charles, influenced by moonshine to the point of sentiment. "I'd be glad to have him for a brother-in-law."

Enid's lip curled as she got up.

"I've heard all I want to of this nonsense! Good-night, Ursula—and good-bye! I've no doubt Carter would have asked you to come with us if he hadn't thought that you would be bored. Keep an eye on Charles!"

She offered a cold cheek to her sister.

"Good-bye, Enid! Have a good time!" said Ursula, kissing her.

"Aren't you going to kiss *me?*" inquired her husband.

"No, I'm not!" replied Enid tartly. "You smell too much of whiskey. If you stay up after eleven o'clock, be sure to let Walton go to bed and tell him that you will put the lights out."

She swept gracefully up-stairs, exquisite and distinguished, conscious of her full value.

Charles put his glass down heavily and slumped into an armchair.

"You can see Enid doesn't care a damn about me!" he muttered. "If she did she wouldn't go off and leave me this way!"

Ursula slipped her hand over the back of her brother-in-law's.

"Poor Charles! I'm sure she does! I know you don't

always get on very well, but no doubt that happens with almost everybody. Enid is very sensitive—to her surroundings."

"I suppose you mean I go in too much for lush!" he grunted. "Well, it's her fault. If she wasn't so infernally chilly to me! Do you know she hasn't kissed me in two months?"

"I'm sure she loves you, Charles, but do you really give her a chance to show it? You tell me you love her, but do you tell her so? A woman ought to be told, Charles. And merely saying the words isn't enough. You ought to show her that you love her."

Into Charles's sodden face came some of the sweetness that had won so many friends for him in his youth. His eyes filled.

"I don't know what to think, Ursula! She's so indifferent to me I'd almost imagine she was interested in some other man, if I didn't know she was not that kind. Enid's always been straight as a string that way. She's naturally cold, I guess. She likes men, but there's nothing personal in it with her. Her interest in them is purely on the intellectual side. And they like her! She's a clever woman! You remember what a hit she made with Lord Reading that time! What she ever saw in a muttonhead like me I can't imagine. That woman could have married anybody!"

He pressed the back of his hand to his eyes.

"Wasn't she wonderful—small head, long neck—a high-stepper! She walked up-stairs that way just a moment ago! I don't believe anybody was ever more in love than I was! And she loved me too! I wasn't then what I am now, by any manner of means!"

He fumbled for a cigarette and lit it, drawing himself slightly up.

"There were plenty of worth-while people ready to shake my hand—here and abroad—as you probably know."

There was a certain fine dignity in his repression.

"Maybe I changed. But, if I did, it was only after Enid seemed to get tired of me. When I had to give up the ponies, something—I don't know what—seemed to go out of me. I hadn't the same kick. Do you realize that practically speaking I never took a drink until after I gave up polo? I never smoked either.

"When we licked the British I had just one swig of 'Velvet' out of Jerry Brookfield's big loving-cup—a toast—and that was all I had had in seventeen years! I don't really care for it now. Do you remember when I was courting Enid? I was hard as nails! No Tum-tum tree then! I was a damn fine forward if I do say it. God made me a polo-player but not a business man. He didn't give me the brains. I sometimes wonder what in hell they pay me for. Maybe I ought never to have married! Do you really think she cares anything about me, Ursula? If I thought so, I swear, I'd go on the wagon again."

"Of course she does!" Ursula was emphatic.

"Well, she shows it in a queer way," agreed Charles in a half-convinced tone. "I've never talked to anybody like this before, Ursula! I just feel confoundedly lonely, that's all. The kids are never home; Enid never seems to want to have me around, and I get so sick of bridge I can hardly look a card in the face. I don't seem to belong anywhere or to be of any use to anybody, except that if I quit going to the office my salary would stop. There are moments——"

He rested his head on the back of his chair. Ursula put her arm across his shoulders.

"Poor Charles!" she whispered. "I wish I could help you!"

"You can help me!" he answered.

"How, Charles dear?"

"By loving me!"

"I do love you, Charles! If there is anything in the world I can do for you——"

"Make Enid love me! O Ursula! That's what I need—love!—Why haven't I got it? It seems as though I had every chance to start with! I was ready to do everything. I thought I was doing everything. But Enid——"

Ursula leaned over and kissed the top of his head, noticing as she did so how thin the hair was getting.

"Charles dear!" she said. "It's never too late. Go up now and tell Enid just what you have told me. I'm sure she'll understand and that everything will be all right."

"Do you think so!"

"I'm sure of it! Tell her everything!"

"If only she'll see it!"

"She will!"

"God bless you, Ursula!"

He took the hand that hung over his shoulder and raised it to his lips.

"If everybody was only like you!" he said in a stifled voice.

CHAPTER III

URSULA bade Charles good-night and started home under the setting moon. From all about her as she spurred along the sleeping countryside, from ditch, swamp, and meadow, came the trill of the peepers. Last night their voices had been raised in protest; now they sang with a wild barbaric sweetness. Her brooding look had vanished and in the faint moonlight the breeze that tossed the hair from her forehead disclosed only the face of a girl, happy, expectant.

The banjo-clock in the hall was just striking twelve when she drew up at the veranda.

"What are you two doing here at this hour?" she demanded as Gay and Jimmy stepped forward to greet her. "I didn't suppose club dances ever really began before twelve!"

"All the respectable people were driven out!" declared Gay disgustedly. "I never saw such dancing—if you could call it that! You see, we made the mistake of having it a charity affair and selling tickets to the public at five dollars apiece. Well—the public came!"

"So did their sisters and their cousins and their aunts—" agreed Jimmy.

"I don't know what we're coming to!" continued Gay. "No doubt it's the influence of the movies and all these cheap novels. People who don't know any better get the idea that society is on the loose."

"From what I saw to-night," interpolated Jim, "I'll say it is!"

"What I want to know," went on Gay, "is what the new generation is coming to. Girls like Ina Thorp and

Florence Mallory. They're only fifteen, but their language is unspeakable. They haven't a spark of decency left. Ina has been engaged three times. There's nothing she doesn't know!"

"I beg to differ!" retorted James. "The fact is they don't know anything about anything. Their little minds are like riven snow. They've just got hold of a lot of weird words and toss them around without having the least idea what they mean. Why the first time Ina got kissed she thought she was engaged. It was Tommy Dally who committed the atrocity—behind the garage. She came running in, dragging the poor boob along with her, to where the family were having afternoon tea and announced that she was going to be married and invited congratulations. Tommy was a little surprised, of course, but he was game enough to stand for it, and next day her mother persuaded her to 'break it off'!"

"Well, I am constrained to admit that you don't labor under any such delusion!" remarked Gay. "This mawling and pawing may have been all right in the dear dead days after the war, but it's old stuff now, along with knee-painting and all the rest of the rotten things they used to do—it won't go!"

"Well, I never painted my knees and I never pawed anybody yet that didn't invite pawing. My strength is as the strength of ten because my heart is pure!"

"Ananias! You forget you tried to kiss me less than fifteen minutes ago!"

"Did I? Come to think of it I do faintly recall the incident. You didn't let me, did you?"

"I really don't remember," replied Gay absently. "Probably I did."

Ursula saw Jimmy's handsome young face expand into a grin.

"Confidentially and not for publication I'll tell you, Miss Weybridge, that she didn't. She's a great kidder —as well as being a great kid!" he added *sotto voce*. "Well, having delivered Mrs. Grundy safely home, I shall now seek my own lonely slats. What time shall I call for you to-morrow, dearie? *The Astarte* sails at noon from Twenty-third Street."

"About ten, I suppose. I've got to go home for some of my things."

"Why not take a wedding-dress?" he inquired. "Old Thrum is going along, you know. It's not a bad idea to have one's vicar-in-ordinary—in case you want to get married or something."

"Vicar extra-ordinary, you mean!" grumbled Gay. "He's a regular old whiz-bang!"

"Maybe when the wind drops he can show us how to walk on the water!" suggested Jimmy. "Well, good-night, ladies!—I've got to leave you now!"

He shook hands and climbed into his roadster, which was standing in the circle. The self-starter groaned, the engine roared, and the headlights slid down the road and wavered across the field.

"A great boy—Jimmy!" said Gay, taking Ursula's arm. "What a gorgeous night! Let's walk to the foot of the orchard. I hate to be leaving you!"

The mist was rising off the valley, diffusing the moonlight, and a veil seemed to have drifted with it across the full brightness of Ursula's happiness. Something had robbed her earlier experience of its innocence. She had begun to feel very old. Were these children not hazarding everything worth having? Had she done the same? She put her arm about Gay. Standing thus they seemed a refracted double image of the same woman.

"Gay!" asked Ursula—"Do you allow men to kiss you?—I mean men like Jimmy Thorne?"

"Why, Ursula!" laughed the girl. "Of course I do! Why shouldn't I? There's no harm in kissing, is there—any more than in shaking hands? It's all a matter of convention. Of course I never kiss a man myself, and I don't let every man I meet kiss me—although most of them try to."

"Gay!"

"Yes, they do! Don't be shocked, Ursula. It's generally merely a game. How could it be anything else, when they don't know you? This falling-in-love-at-first-sight stuff is all bunk. If it's a moonlight night and a girl is pretty or a man has had a couple of drinks he naturally wants to kiss her. If he didn't there'd be something wrong about him, wouldn't there? And it isn't going to kill a girl to let a man kiss her, particularly if she isn't likely to see him again. It's not the kiss itself but what it signifies that counts. Any girl likes to let herself go once in a while, take a day off, if there's no come-back. She needn't mind being kissed, so long as the man doesn't mean anything by it. All the girls let Bob Morgan kiss them, simply because they realize he's a sort of professional and it isn't going to involve them in anything. But if some noble and intelligent young man came along and in a trembling voice charged with emotion asked leave to kiss them they'd run like rabbits. Of course I wouldn't let a man kiss me seriously, so to speak, unless I was willing to consider marrying him. That's the only reason I ever let Jimmy kiss me, and I'm not letting him kiss me any more."

"Why not?"

"Because I almost think I might marry Jimmy some day," said Gay meditatively, "and I don't want him

to get the idea that I simply come along with any pound of tea."

Ursula withdrew her arm.

"I knew I'd shock you!" said Gay. "I can't help it! You asked me and I wouldn't lie to you. I've simply told you the truth. Most girls let themselves be kissed occasionally these days. *Honi soit qui mal y pense!*"

"Come!" said Ursula. "It's getting cold. Let's go in."

"Say you don't think I'm perfectly horrid!" Gay caught her aunt's hand and held on to it appealingly. "Maybe they're right when they say we've had the bloom rubbed off us; maybe we have lost something! But I don't want to lose you, Ursula! I haven't, have I? Say I haven't lost you!"

Ursula drew the girl to her side and kissed her.

"No, dear! You never will—And I don't think you're perfectly horrid—only a little—what shall I say?—common, perhaps?" she faltered, feeling herself a hypocrite and mentally including herself as a co-defendant in the indictment.

"You make me feel like a swine, Ursula!" said Gay. "You don't know how I love and admire you! You're so different from us. Your idealism is so beautiful! Your standards are so high. We haven't any—such as you have, I mean. We're really pretty hard and selfish! But we're not bad. Don't make any mistake about that. We want to get the best price for ourselves we can.—But you're really awfully innocent, Ursula! And you mustn't judge us too hard!"

"I don't judge you, dear!" Ursula assured her. "I wouldn't presume to—or dare to. And I'm not innocent! I only wish I were! We belong to different generations. '*Autres temps autres mœurs.*' I do think that a

lot of the things you do and say are cheap and vulgar. But I think you put your worst foot foremost and that you talk the way you do largely because you hate what you call bunk, and are so afraid some one will think you are hypocritical that you make a fetish of frankness. Part of it is your desire for truth, part of it is your lack of religion, and part of it may be just plain wantonness, but I don't believe it's the age half as much as the girl herself. An age may tend to produce more of one type or more of another, and the less conventional of us will always be saying to the others: 'Dost thou think because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?' I fancy we are all of us pretty much the same and I'm sure you are absolutely all right, even if—if you do shock me a little sometimes."

Gay shook her head.

"We're not all right, Ursula. Don't fool yourself! I merely don't want you to be too hard on us."

"I shan't be," said Ursula. "You can be sure of that. And I hope you'll always come to me if you're in any doubt or trouble. Kiss me, dear! It's time for us to turn in."

They clung to one another for a second or two and walked back through the orchard hand in hand, their fingers interlocked. Once more at the foot of the stairs they embraced and again at the top. Then each sought her own room and her own dreams.

"All the same," thought Gay, as she undressed, "I bet she's been kissed herself more than once in her life!"

Peter left his companions at the door of the Hotel Croyon, having hardly spoken to them during the drive to the city. His ideas, if not his ideals, had received a shock. That a woman like Ursula should allow her-

self to be kissed by a man who was in effect a stranger seemed incredible to him. The episode had disconcerted him far more than there appeared to be any sound reason for.

Starting with an attitude toward sex which was, to say the least, austere, he had idealized woman until he saw her only as a spirit. His boyish concept of a sweetheart—the "little wife"—had remained intact since his high-school days. By camp-fire and mountain trail he had carried with him this youthful vision of romance, in which the central figure was always an ethereal young girl—a child, never a woman. A good mixer among men, he was inevitably hesitant and self-conscious with women. His life in the mining-camps had emphasized for him the truth of the Western axiom that there were only two kinds, and he had learned little of either. Hence, his ideals of love and marriage had remained immature.

He had never met or imagined a woman like Ursula Weybridge, and had he done so he was much too modest to suppose that he could attract her. Such women theoretically existed perhaps—in novels—but not for him. Anyhow they were out of his class. He knew no brilliant women, and few beautiful ones. The society leaders of Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico with whom he had been thrown in contact were, with few exceptions, efficient ladies with broad hips and narrow morals.

Ursula was like a new planet in his ken, illuminating everything with a strange, unearthly radiance—a phenomenon, not a woman. He had felt the witchery of the moonlight, the call of that magic moment when she had led him to the shore with words of silver—to Innisfree! Midnight had been "all a glimmer," the evening full of the "linnets' wings," until his kiss had precipitated romance into passion and its warmth had tarnished the

moonlight upon her cheek. He could feel it still as he sat at his bedroom window, listening to the throb of the city's heart and looking down upon the scurrying lights of Park Avenue.

Why had that contact so natural, so impulsive, worked a disenchantment? Had it sowed the seed of disillusion, if not of suspicion in his mind? Was she free like that with other men? If she had been so with him, why not—! Yet how mean, how utterly base, to blame her for that which he had provoked and which she had given so ungrudgingly. Why had he kissed her!

Peter gave neither of them the excuse of being human beings. Yet the fact that he had in some way shattered his ideal of her filled him with regret. Why did he care? He had never cared before! But in spite of this he felt again the echo of desire, a wish to feel his lips once more upon her cheek. She was no longer for him either an angel or a princess—the gossamer cloak had been torn away, revealing the woman. Better thus, perhaps.

CHAPTER IV

URSULA awoke the morning after her birthday to a different world. Her lassitude and discontent had vanished. All her interest in the details of life had returned, and she sang as she came down-stairs to join Gay on the breakfast-porch. The girl's bags were already on the veranda.

"I wish you were going with us, Ursula!" she said. "I shall miss you awfully. I suppose mother and I will fight like cats! I hate her using me as entertainer for a bunch of senile old men while she flirts with Carter Blair! I'll have to get engaged to Jimmy right off in self-defense. Anyhow that's my big idea at present!"

"You ought not to talk about your mother like that, Gay!" answered Ursula severely. "It's the worst imaginable taste. Besides, you know it isn't true!"

"Sweet innocence! Do you suppose they go yachting for the scenery?"—Then as she saw the indignation in her aunt's eyes— "Of course I don't mean anything serious. Everybody knows Carter likes mother. After all, he's a man—why shouldn't he? Men seem to!"

"Gay! What a way to talk about your mother!"

"Well, what's the use faking a feeling one hasn't got!"

"You ought to try to have it."

"She doesn't care any more for me than I do for her. She's glad enough to have me stay most of the time over here with you. I don't think she cares for anybody but herself!" Gay got up and stretched, her white knitted Jersey disclosing every muscle in her slim, lithe

figure. "But don't let's quarrel over her! Do you realize that we shan't see each other for at least six weeks?"

"Six?—I thought you were only going to be gone for three."

"Yes, but Jimmy's father is taking us both up to the Restigouche salmon-fishing, the day after we get back. That is supposed to cement our ties! The old man's got a heavy sneaker for me! Wants to see his young hopeful married safely to a sweet young girl. That's me. 'Sweet young thing'! In some ways the old boy is better than Jimmy. We've got one polo-player in the family already! Dad's a dear, but I can't say I regard him as a howling success otherwise."

"If you marry as good a man as your father you can afford to let the success go. Jimmy strikes me as a nice boy. And I should say he was very much in love with you. Why *not* marry him?"

"Oh, Jimmy's all right! He's a sort of half-wit, but then—so am I. I daren't open my mouth when there are any older people around. I blame mother for never making me read."

"Why don't you begin? Do you like poetry?"

"I might. I think Edna St. Vincent Millay is simply swell! Why not commence my education—give me something to read on the boat."

Ursula went into the library and returned with her second copy of the "Oxford Book of Verse." "Begin at the end and work back," she advised. "Yeats, and Henley, Stevenson and Mrs. Meynell, before you attempt the archaic. Why don't you learn a little by heart—'Innisfree' for instance?"

"Thanks! Maybe I will!"

Gay opened her suitcase to slip in the book just as Jimmy rolled up to take her away.

"Come on, kiddo!" he shouted. "I've the marriage license in my pocket!—And the Reverend Thrum is waiting for us."

That Ursula had not been invited upon the cruise was rather a relief to her, for there were moments when the rector of St. Timothy's was prone to regard her with anything but a pastoral eye, and on such occasions she found his elephantine attentions distinctly burdensome. But, in his way, Thrum was a remarkable man, although his life did not in the remotest degree resemble that of the Founder of the religion which he preached.

He was, so to speak, an ecclesiastical financier, and his predilection for "taking a day or two off" with millionaire parishioners was well known to the vestry, who regarded his outings in the light of business opportunities. Hence Senior Warden Pepperill, when the matter came up for discussion around his own mahogany, was accustomed to take a lenient, if cynical, view of the rector's departures from clerical convention, and the rest of the port-sipping vestry were apt to agree with him.

"Rule of Thrum! Ha-ha!" he would chuckle. "They have hunting parsons in England; why not here?"

It was the astounding fact, that Thrum had somehow or other miraculously raised nearly two millions for the new St. Timothy's, which was intended to be a replica of the cathedral at Bourges, including the "Tour de Beurre." He had a card-catalogue of all his communicants, giving the approximate income of each, so that he knew where he stood and how far he could go. Blair was down for a hundred thousand—a good "prospect."

Religion at St. Timothy's seemed so much a matter of money that Ursula had consistently refused to go

there. Even the parish house, where she might have otherwise worked, struck her as an inexcusably expensive philanthrophy, if indeed it was entitled to be called a philanthropy at all in view of the comfortable circumstances of most of the people to whose supposed needs it ministered. They all were strictly Episcopalian, so that at least the money went in the right direction. The St. Timothy's Baby Clinic, however, was actually non-sectarian, and a child born in Romanism, Jewry, Yoga, New Thought, or Free Love received the same treatment as one properly offered at the sacramental font for holy baptism.

Ursula, who had undertaken the management of it, spent two whole days there each week. She had a natural gift with children. It was something of an inspiration to see her take a red, squawling, and dirty infant from the arms of an equally dirty mother, weigh and wash it, and hand it back in twenty minutes in freshly laundered clothes. Once a year she had all her babies and their mothers down for a holiday at "Folly Farm."

Daylight had brought with it an utter incredulity as to what had occurred at Enid's. It was ridiculous to suppose that she had fallen in love with an entire stranger, a man so different from what she had fancied her ideal to be, and so much younger than herself in years in spite of his maturity. Nevertheless, she could not get his image out of her mind. Wherever she looked she seemed to see his intent, determined face. She could see the flow of blood under his tan, the lonely look in his eyes as he regarded her. And she wanted to take his head in her arms and clasp it tight to her bosom as she would one of the infants at the nursery—nothing more. Except possibly to kiss his forehead.

"It's perfectly absurd!" she kept repeating. "Ridiculous!—A woman as old as I am!"

She found herself strangely excited at the thought of seeing him again; resolving at the same time to put everything upon a sound and proper footing. She made no preparations for his reception. He must know her as she really was—the cordial, but composed and slightly remote hostess—the mature, cool woman of the world who not only kept fools at a distance but herself never stooped to folly, whose heart was hidden and whose thoughts were veiled. Another woman might have spent the morning in uselessly wandering about the house, rearranging the chairs, cutting fresh flowers, and decorating the lunch-table in the arbor. But she did not. She did not even change her dress. Nor did she send the motor to meet him at the railroad-station,—he could get himself to the farm like any other man. She was down in the orchard when Peter's taxi whirred up the hill.

That first evening, under the half-light of the candles and afterward in the blur of the moonlight, she had not looked much, if anything, over twenty. He had seen only the smooth contours, the mysterious shadows beneath her eyes, the exquisite shape of her head, the proud upward sweep of her full throat from the swelling shoulders—like a Grecian bust in the shadow of a dim alcove.

Now, in the dappled sunlight, he saw a woman no longer in the first flush of youth, but with a wealth of character in her face to whose high breeding the years, which had etched it there, had brought an added beauty of dignity and sweetness. She welcomed him genially enough, but, it seemed to him, with a certain aloofness which he did not fully understand.

"She's trying to show me where I belong!" he thought

humbly. "Well, it's mighty nice of her to bother with me at all!"

His marked attitude of humility was painfully disappointing to her. She would have liked him to be respectful, but at the same time to be strong—even perhaps a little masterful.

"Oh, dear!" she thought, "why can't he be natural? Why can't we get on an equal footing! He acts like a little boy!"

And then she perceived that it was her own fault, that she had frightened and congealed him, and she was sorry. "Everything is getting all mixed up!" she sighed, realizing that she could not manœuvre with a person as simple as he was without raising false barriers that she might never be able to pull down.

They were standing on the grass in front of the farmhouse while she indicated the direction of the city and points of interest on the Connecticut shore, and he was following her finger with his eyes, his hat held stiffly in both his hands in an attitude of exaggerated politeness.

"And Bridgeport is over that way—" Unexpectedly she dropped her hand and turned to him with a frankly amused look. "What nonsense this all is!" she exclaimed. "You're not a bit like yourself—and, to be honest, neither am I. I was perfectly sincere about wanting to be friends. But I got worrying about—about your possibly misinterpreting what happened last evening, and I made the silly mistake of thinking that the way to prevent it was by being disagreeable. Forgive me for having been nasty. Let's start all over again!"

He gave her a grateful smile.

"I'm glad of that!" he declared. "I was afraid I'd put my foot in it again somehow and offended you. That's the very last thing in the world I want to do, of

course. You can't guess how I value the privilege of knowing you."

"That is sweet of you! What happened at my sister's in itself was nothing. We both acted on a passing impulse, foolish but natural and perhaps excusable. It is only what is behind anything of that sort that counts, and of course there was nothing behind it. But it might have put our entire friendship on a falsely sentimental basis and—and spoiled everything. We've got to forget it and start all over again. I want to be your friend—and, if I have to say it myself, I give my friendship to only a few. It means a good deal with me. But it's only friendship and you must not mistake it!"

She held out her hand. He took it and bent over it in a way utterly at variance with his former clumsiness.

"Thank you!" he said. "I understand perfectly. I was entirely to blame for that moonlight episode. You really weren't yourself——"

"Exactly! I wasn't——"

"And I had no business to do what I did. But if you forgive me—well, I guess it's all right! I admit, you did frighten me to-day. I'm not used to women like you. You're so wonderful to look at, you know so much more than I do, you've had so much more of everything, that I can't believe you can really see anything in me. I've never known any society woman before. The kind I've seen, that thought they were—weren't!"

"What kind have you seen?" she asked.

"Oh, I've known some very nice women—wives of our local managers and superintendents. And once in a while some Eastern swells used to drop in to get a taste of wild life from the back platform of a private car. But the ones that 'put on dog' in a mining-camp aren't ones you'd ask to visit you. And they aren't up on the classics.

Still—" he laughed, "there's no accounting for tastes—is there? There used to be a moth-eaten old mule up at Morenci that made friends with a mountain-lioness belonging to Jake Woolly, our foreman. Jake had caught her young and kept her in a cage back of the house, and the mule used to hang around there most of the time."

"Where do I figure in this allegory?"

Peter grinned.

"There I go! Well, I guess I'm the mule!"

"So I'm the caged lioness?"

"You've just given me the best evidence in the world that you're not a man-eater!" he replied. "I don't see any claws!"

They got on together after that like happy children. He had taken her literally—had accepted her friendship as she had offered it, without reservation. He did not question its sincerity or hers. He talked to her as freely as he would have to a side-partner. She had never had a brother; her father had not been a man of action; and she listened avidly to his stories of gold-mining in Australia, of prospecting in the interior of New Guinea among the cannibal tribes, of operating coal-mines for Chinese viceroys, and of fighting the Yaquis in Sonora, where he had received the scar upon his chin.

He had a rather refreshing way of referring to remote places as if they were just around the corner, and he had a curiously practical knowledge of history, in which kings and emperors figured but little, and iron, tin, and copper, gold and silver took the place of dynasties and politics. "The Greeks did that!" he might say, or "The Persians had that!"

"It's wonderful—all this soft color!" he marvelled as they sat over their coffee, and looked across to where the brook traced its silver question-mark upon the meadow.

"I like the desert—the blaze and the bite of it—but it's a relentless struggle with nature all the time. And it makes you tired and thirsty. You long for something green and restful, a few clouds in the sky, blue water, trees, flowers—scenery that's less—less——"

He sought for the word he wanted.

"Uncompromising?"

"That's it! You see those shadows of trees over there? You'd hardly know they were shadows. You can't tell precisely where that hilltop ends and the clouds over it begin, can you? They all melt up together. Well, out at Oxide or Nacozari or Ajo those shadows would look as if they'd been stamped out with a steel die, and that hill as if it was shaking its fist at the sky."

"I wonder," she mused, looking at him, "whether life where there are no half-tones, as it were, makes people more uncompromising."

"Harder, you mean?"

"Not harder, necessarily—stronger, rather."

He nodded slightly.

"You have to play straight on the desert!"

"It teaches a pretty good religion then."

"All I've got."

"All you need. That's all any religion teaches, isn't it? And the desert wouldn't teach you that unless you felt something behind it."

"Well," he said thoughtfully, "to be honest, I've never been able to formulate exactly what I did feel was behind it. Only I know that there is something and that, whatever it is, I'm part of it. Anything I do to myself I do to the whole business."

His thirst for "something green" showed itself in his delight over the farm. He had been living in tents, shanties, and company boarding-houses most of his life

—with an occasional debauch in the nature of a metropolitan hotel—and most of his belongings could go easily into a couple of good-sized valises.

Later on, when she took him for a short run in her roadster and then left him at the elevated station at Jamaica, not a vestige of awkwardness remained between them. The ambiguity of their relationship at Enid's was completely wiped out. Their friendship had been put, as she had desired it to be, on a practical working basis. Yet when she entered the house on her return she knew that she was deceiving herself. She was twice as lonely as before he had been there. Why had she not asked him to stay to dinner? She had no engagement and was morally certain that he had none.

She looked at her watch. No, he could not reach the city for another half-hour. Even then he might not return at once to his hotel. She decided that he would probably dine there, though—for he had expressly told her that he had no friends in New York except the Kents and Carter Blair. How silly not to have kept him! What a nice evening they could have had! She smoked a cigarette nervously, taking up one book after another and throwing aside each in turn. Suppose she called him up and on some pretext asked him to come back? That would never do!

He was certainly at the Croyon by now. How would it do to call him up and make an early date for next week? He had not suggested it; yet under the circumstances he would probably expect the advances to come from her. If she had not made a point of throwing cold water on any sentiment, he might have invited her to do something. The emptiness of the house was unbearable. She must call him up!

The telephone in the library rang sharply and all the

blood in her body surged toward her heart. Her fingers were like ice as she picked up the receiver.

"Is that Miss Weybridge?"

She strove to control her voice.

"Yes. Who is it, please?"

"McKay—Peter McKay. I'm back in town. It just occurred to me—I'm so stupid about this sort of thing! —I don't suppose there's a chance of it! But would you care to come in and dine and go to the theatre with me?"

"Oh, I couldn't! Could I?—Let me see!" she temporized. "Perhaps—I might, I suppose—if you really want me——"

It was decided that she should meet him at the Ritz at eight o'clock.

The evening was a success. As the escort of a beautiful woman Peter exhibited an aplomb in striking contrast to his previous diffidence. Ursula was even a little worried by his lavishness. The dinner was superlative; the revue new and amusing; their seats the best; and afterward Ursula insisted on walking down Broadway before going home to her apartment.

He had taken her gloved hand and slipped it through his arm with a friendly little pat. She could feel the play of his biceps as he steered her through the gay crowd. How hard and muscular he was! How much better-looking than any of the other men about her! Laughing, she dragged him back to the outskirts of the crowd about an arcade, to listen to a man auctioning off bizarre vases, grotesquely painted china, chromos in gilt plaster frames.

"Look at that terrible lithograph!—Who do you suppose buys such awful things?" she asked.

"Idiots like us!" he answered joyfully. "—and ten!" he called over the heads of the throng.

"You can give it to my baby clinic!" she suggested bravely.

They loitered under the blue lights examining photographs of flaccid youths and simpering girls, while talking-machines squawked, mechanical pianos jingled, and a barker standing under a string of lanterns on the front seat of a sight-seeing bus intoned like a muezzin from a minaret: "All aboard for Dreamland! Only a dollar! Get your places! Starting now! All aboard for Dreamland!" On a truck jammed in the traffic behind them a muddy-faced youth was singing in a high baritone the latest "song hit," "If I get you, you'll—know—what to—ex-pect!" From the open windows of cabarets came the blare of trombones and the whimper and whine of the "baby sax," mingled with the impatient hooting of the taxis. "The Ten Commandments" challenged in letters of fire "The Seven Deadly Sins." She was so happy! So foolishly, carelessly happy! Must it end so soon? Must she leave this gay carnival of laughter, music, and flashing lights? Return to her apartment with its single bedroom and kitchenette? Send him back alone to his stuffy room at the Croyon? Nobody was going home. To-morrow was Sunday. This night was hers!

Electric signs caressed the sky with a softly glowing radiance; the night shuddered to the passionate insistence of the tom-tom, quivered to the brazen yearning that for centuries had roused savage tribes to erotic frenzy. Something deep down in her subconsciousness that she had never known was there—something wild that frightened yet filled her with a reckless elation—took possession of her.

"Do you dance?" she asked.

"Of course I do!" he responded instantly, squeezing her hand tightly beneath his arm. "Come on! There's a place just over there!"

They spent the next day at Long Beach. It was wonderful to sit lazily on the smooth sand watching the glint and twinkle of the waves while he lay stretched at full length beside her. She knew she was courting danger—but she no longer cared. All that sententious stuff about friendship—"friendship and nothing more"—she had deliberately thrown overboard.

She realized now that she was in love, and she yielded herself utterly to this new emotion that lifted her up and swept her off her feet so that she had no power to resist. She had thrust a volume of Meredith's poems into her hand-bag and she read some of them to him now. He listened appreciatively, but evidently without comprehension.

"It's pretty stiff for me!" he admitted, "but I love to listen to your voice. Read some more!"

So, because he liked her voice, she read him "Love in the Valley."

They dined at the hotel, but afterward he did not suggest dancing and she wandered along the beach with him again, unmindful of who saw them. She had learned by this time that his shyness was only with her. With people in general he was somewhat authoritative, due probably to being accustomed to direct other men. Self-reliant, rather inflexible—she concluded, preferring not to use the word stubborn, which truly would have been more apposite. A man who, it would appear, had himself in complete control. Clear-headed, logical—a "bitter-ender," she guessed, when it came to matters of principle. Yet she was curious as to why he had not asked her to dance.

"You'll laugh when I tell you," he confessed, "but I could no more dance on Sunday than I could take another man's money. I agree it's ridiculous, but—the fact remains. You see, on my mother's side, I come of a line of Baptist clergymen—and all that Sabbatarian business is ingrained."

"Why don't you go to church?"

"I do—when I can."

"Why didn't you go to-day?"

"That's a funny question for you to ask!" he expostulated.

"But if it's a matter of principle!" she taunted him.

"It isn't—exactly," he replied. "I've had precious little chance to go to church in my life—fact is, I've got rather out of the habit. And—like most people, I guess—I've got another side to my character. My father's family were an entirely different lot—smugglers—slave-traders—pirates, before that."

"How interesting! It's rather romantic to have a pirate ancestor. What was his name?"

"Peter McKay—the same as mine. They called him 'The Black Scot.' He was unjustly indicted for murder as a young man, but escaped from prison and went to the Indies, where he bought a schooner which he named *The Avenger*, enlisted a crew, and for years terrorized the northern coast of South America. In the end she was sunk by a British cruiser, with all on board."

"So you're part Baptist and part buccaneer! Which of your two sides predominates?"

"Neither. They're struggling more or less all the time. 'For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man;

but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.' "

She regarded him aghast.

"How extraordinary! That must be the Baptist in you! Do you know much of the Bible by heart?"

"Some of it—I understand Paul. I know how he felt."

"But how about the buccaneer? Have you ever killed a man?"

His face darkened.

"Once. I don't like to think about it. He was a bad 'hombre'—but a sort of martyr, at that. He crossed the 'dead-line' we laid down in a row with the Wabblies at Oxide. Don't think I enjoyed doing it. I'd rather have cut my hand off, but that wouldn't have done any good. I sometimes wonder whether it was the Baptist or the buccaneer did that."

"I know—it was the Baptist!"

Ursula touched his arm.

"You mustn't mind if I tease you a little. I think perhaps I like the buccaneer in you the best, after all."

The following week resolved itself into one of intensive companionship, during which they usually lunched and inevitably dined together, going afterward to a play, roof-garden, or cabaret. By Tuesday afternoon they were calling each other by their first names. By Wednesday it was, "Well, where shall we go to-night?" Ursula might have continued oblivious to the existence of any world outside her own crystal sphere of happiness had it not been for Peter's eager assiduity in finding new places to amuse her. Among these was a pseudo-Russian resort called "The Cave of the Fallen

Angels" to which he took her with some slight misgivings toward the end of the week.

There was hardly room to turn around, for the tables were jammed one against the other and heaped with dishes, and the voices of the singers seemed even more blatant than the colors of the futurist decorations upon the walls—but once inside escape was impossible, for the head-waiter ostentatiously conducted them to a reservation directly in front of the stage where a performance in imitation of the "Chauve Souris" was going on. Presently—with a final whoop from Katrinka, a shout from her rubicund father, and a squeal from her multi-petticoated mama, the curtain fell, the lights went up, the waiters came bustling in, and the audience noisily resumed its business of eating and talking.

Ursula was about to light a cigarette at Peter's match when across his shoulder she caught sight of Charles, her brother-in-law, at the adjoining table. The woman with him belonged unmistakably to the ambiguous class of "perfect ladies"—an old-timer, obviously, who traded less on her good looks than on her good-nature. Peter, with his back turned, had not noticed either of them.

It was an unpleasant moment. That Charles had recognized her there could be no doubt, for, although he allowed no overt sign to escape him, the blood crept to his hair, as he listened studiously to what his companion was saying. Ursula laid down her cigarette.

"I don't think this is very amusing," she said. "What do you say? Shall we go?—It's so hot!"

CHAPTER V

THE eight brazen strokes from *The Astarte's* forward deck, marking the hour for dinner, were returned in quivering overtones from a dozen other craft lying in Newport harbor.

"No—no! No—no! No—no! No—no!" they seemed to be saying; and others, farther off but no less positive, hastened to agree. "No—no! No—no! No—no! No—no!"

Enid, dressing in her stateroom, wondered why they should be so sharply emphatic. Were they warning her against the course she was contemplating and in furtherance of which she had instigated the cruise? Through the port-hole came the dank smell of the tide which she had learned to associate with freedom, and with the kind of life she loved, a freedom from marital and domestic obligations, in which she could gratify every whim with an elegant disregard of cost. For to all intents and purposes *The Astarte*, from the moment the captain saluted her at the top of the gangway until the dingy left her at the club landing, was her private yacht.

She was in no hurry to go down to the saloon, since she took the same satisfaction in making others wait that she did in not waiting for others; and on *The Astarte* she exercised all the privileges of a hostess without any of the corresponding obligations. So she loitered before the mirror, giving herself a final touch here and there, although the launch bringing on board the Garry Allyns had long since come alongside, and she knew that Carter

would be fretting because she was not on hand to receive them with him.

Let him fret! There was just one way in which he could be sure of having her there, and as yet he had not suggested it. Had it been a mistake to surrender her lips to him that night at "The Mews"? In the pink afterglow of the port-hole she looked surprisingly young. She was more slender than Ursula, neatly turned everywhere, with delicate hands and feet, her features slightly aquiline after the fashion sometimes called "aristocratic,"—"smart," to use her own term; but what fixed the attention which her figure first attracted was the contrast between her brunette coloring and the china-blue eyes that opened at one in such innocent surprise. It was as though by some trick of nature Ursula had been given the eyes that should have been Enid's, and Enid those intended for Ursula. She was dressed now in a brocade of silver, harmonious to the sea, subtly suggestive of mermaids and moonlight.

The rest of the party, with the exception of Roderick Thrum, were already assembled—Gay, Blair, Vincent Pepperill, Bob Morgan, Jimmy Thorne, and the Allyns. The reverend had gone ashore after lunch to take the train for New York, in order to fill the pulpit at St. Timothy's next day. "O ye whales and all that move in the waters, bless ye the Lord!"

Carter's face reflected his relief at her appearance.

"Hello, Teeny!—howd'y, Garry!" Enid shook hands with the two guests who had been asked because she wanted to keep up all her Newport connections even if the Allyns did not move in the most conservative of circles.

The cocktails had already been passed and dinner was announced almost immediately. Blair led the way into

the oak-finished saloon and, placing Mrs. Allyn upon his right and Enid upon his left, allowed the others to seat themselves where they chose. He was a conspicuous figure everywhere, with his great height and his ruddy cheeks in vivid contrast to his snow-white hair, but here he looked colossal. It was far more difficult to entertain the suggestion that this healthy, handsome gentleman had been a business cutthroat than to discard it as incredibly inconsistent with the obvious amiability of his character. Yet it was generally known that in his earlier career he had done, as a matter of course, things which to-day would have landed him in Atlanta. That period was now over. He had "got his," as he expressed it, and was making "the Ten Commandments work for him." Nevertheless, he craved social recognition. As a bachelor his hospitality was cramped. He was beginning to feel the need of an establishment with the right woman at the head of it. Besides, he was getting along, and, as he expressed it, he was "sick of running around."

Enid seemed to him exactly the right person. That she was married already hardly occurred to him as an impediment. He had never yet failed to get what he wanted by paying for it. The only question was as to the price.

Enid herself had been brought up to regard divorce as putting both parties, whether innocent or guilty, beyond the pale of decent society. A respectable woman did not divorce her husband, and a gentleman of course could not divorce his wife. But her conservativeness had not been proof against the general marital laxity. When half the people you knew were divorced you might as well give up trying to entertain if you drew any line at all.

The clerical attitude toward the matter was theo-

retical rather than practical. Thrum had never exhibited any disinclination for the society of divorced persons. He took their money as readily as anybody else's. The church's disapproval was clearly in the nature of a polite fiction, to be taken in a Pickwickian sense. And as for the state, divorce was as regular as marriage.

As she looked about the glittering, flower-covered table she realized that economically speaking, at least, she was already Blair's wife. It was in effect her yacht, the guests her guests,—his only through her. Whatever of interest the coming summer had to offer she would owe to him. He had become essential to her existence. It was Blair who supplied all her pleasures and shared them with her—discreetly, of course;—they were always abundantly chaperoned. Her six weeks on his houseboat at Palm Beach and along the Florida Keys, the theatre and supper parties to which she always issued the invitations, that wonderful trip in his private car to the Arizona mining-camps—business, of course, and with Charles cheerfully along—had made the winter for her.

This was the life which she enjoyed, which she regarded as her due, and which she adored. It was wasted on the boorish Charles. Her marriage to him, induced by her own mistake as to his means, now seemed in her eyes to have been the result of a deliberate false representation upon his part. Perhaps she could get the marriage annulled. The children presented no difficulty whatever, for they were practically grown up. Gay would marry Jimmy Thorne, "Babs" would be out next year, and "Carlo" was going to college.

Ursula would disapprove, of course! But what Ursula thought did not matter one way or the other.

Pepperill and Morgan were discussing a peculiarly

fine claret which the latter had stumbled upon in one of the smaller restaurants, and which one could buy in any quantity at a reasonable price.

"They bring it in as communion wine," the architect explained. Jimmy and Gay were joshing one another at the end of the table and paying no attention to anybody else. The cadaverous Mr. Allyn, who had a two-storied bald head, with a toupee resembling a heavy mustache in the middle of his forehead, relinquished his soup-plate to the white-jacketed steward, patted his mouth with his napkin, and politely inquired of Enid where she expected to spend the summer.

"'Teeny' and I are goin' to Scotland," he informed her. "It's quite surprisin' how many Americans have taken moors this year."

"There'll be quite a crowd of us, Enid dear!" said Teeny. "You'd better come along. You can run a whole house over there on what you have to pay a butler in New York. You ought to take a moor, Carter!" She flashed an impudent pair of green eyes at both of them. "No doubt you could find a friend or two to join you!"

"I'm satisfied—where I am—at least for the present," Blair replied in a tone intended for Enid.

"Personally I prefer America in the summer," supplemented the latter, suppressing an impulse to gouge out Teeny's eyes. "Besides I couldn't bear to miss the international polo, particularly when Jimmy has such an excellent chance of being on the team. And naturally, Charles with his English connections would not think of going away. You've heard of course that the prince is coming over as Baron Renfrew. We shall be having a lot of people down."

She did not intentionally seek to give the impression that his royal highness would be one of the number, al-

though quite willing to suggest an intimacy. Teeny took warning from Enid's stiff demeanor.

"Well, I envy you!" she replied. "Speaking of the little prince—poor Alice Manchester, who was so gone on him when he was over here before, is engaged again."

"Who to—this time?" inquired Gay impudently.

"Jack Padelford," answered Mrs. Allyn, who had shortly before been Mrs. Fanshaw and who, rumor now had it, would speedily change her matrimonial spots for the third time.

"I thought he was living with Roberta Bangs, the movie star?" murmured Morgan, his eyes fixed vaguely upon space.

"He was!" answered Teeny. "But this is Alice's mating-season."

"It's always the mating-season with Alice!" commented Gay.

Enid was not enjoying the conversation, but she did not know how to stop it.

"I can't imagine what she sees in him!" continued Mrs. Allyn.

Mr. Pepperill gave a slight cough.

"A husband, possibly," he hazarded.

Morgan assumed an expression of profound thought.

"If I remember—Alice does not marry," he reflected.

"But neither does Jack!" Gay reminded him.

"An ideal engagement!" agreed the lawyer.

Blair had been listening attentively.

"Jack Padelford wouldn't give up his liberty for any woman!" he announced with authority.

"It's all slavery!" declared the architect. "The only difference is that you can divorce a wife but not an actress."

Enid compressed her lips.

"I am glad Mr. Thrum is not here!" she said starchily.

"I'm rather relieved than otherwise myself!" agreed the ambiguous Morgan, and by a tacit understanding the subject was dropped.

But the conversation had served to stimulate Enid's previous train of thought. Her present existence was as dry as the bread she crumbled so nervously between her fingers.

"Why don't you four make a table at bridge?" she suggested as they arose. "Carter and I will cut in later."

She knew there would be no need of their cutting in. The Allyn family would be engrossed until midnight in relieving the punctilious Pepperill and his architectural associate of their money. When they added up scores she must be able to do the same.

As she came on deck the launch was already churning at the gangway, waiting to take Jimmy and Gay ashore to the movies.

"Serve the coffee aft," she ordered the deck steward. "And don't forget that the launch has to take the Allyns ashore, Jimmy dear."

"Oh, we'll be back ages before that!" he replied, as Gay, disdaining his hand, leaped into the boat beside him.

The night was calm—far calmer than Enid, and the scurrying launch left a trail of phosphorescent fireflies around the stern that entangled themselves in the reflections of the stars. A cerise and silver glow still lingered above the islands.

"I'm glad you don't care for bridge," said Blair, following her to the stern. "I like to lose my money quicker!"

They settled themselves in their customary deck-chairs, and waited for the steward who had brought the coffee to go away.

"Have you a cigarette?" she asked, and when he proffered his open case, allowed her fingers to linger against his.

"You're looking too lovely to-night!" he said as his match lit up her face. "Do you know what a really beautiful woman you are, Enid?"

"I know what an unhappy one I am!" she answered in that wistful voice that never failed to move him. "It's only when I get away from it all—like this—that I know what happiness is."

The tip of his cigar glowed suddenly and then subsided.

"It's a damn shame!" he muttered.

"I wouldn't mind so much if Charles were really horrid to me!" she went on drearily. "It's his indifference, his total lack of—understanding!"

She bit her lips, seeming to hold back the tears.

"I sometimes wonder how there ever can be such a thing as a happy marriage. For we marry purely imaginary people who have no real existence. I awoke to find myself married to a stranger!"

"I know!" he said, reaching over and taking her hand. "I've been through the mill myself. Well, you've always got your old Carter! All you've got to do is to send out a hurry call. He'll always be there."

She gave his big fingers a gentle pressure.

"If it wasn't for my old Carter, as you call him, I should be desperate." She withdrew her hand. "Oh, what's the use! I'm caught like a mouse in a trap!" This time the sob broke through. Blair rose to his feet, deeply agitated. The stars were weaving scrolls of gold upon the black incoming tide.

Even Carter Blair never had been able to stand a woman's crying, and in his crude way he adored this

high-bred courtesan as the personification of beauty, intelligence, gentleness, and purity. A shaft of yellow light from the open companionway gilded the mast and rigging, throwing the part of the deck where they sat into deeper obscurity. The click of cards showed that the bridgers were thoroughly occupied.

"Double one heart!" floated crisply upward. Teeny was forever "doubling hearts." There was no sound save the far-away dip of oars and the smothered rasp of a graphophone playing a fox-trot on another yacht a hundred yards away.

Blair bent close.

"Enid!" he said thickly. "You know I love you. We can't go on this way. I'm only human and I can't stand it. And people talk no matter what you do. We can't go off together like this indefinitely. I want you. I want you to be with me always."

She laid her head against his shoulder.

"Why didn't we meet long ago, before it was too late!"

"It isn't too late! It's never too late."

"I wish that were true! But my life is over, Carter. There's not a ray of light in it except our friendship. You're all I've got!"

The deck was empty save for the anchor-watch, and Blair put his arm about her.

"You can have me always. All it needs is a little courage. The law will free you from your husband. It's an easy matter!"

She shivered in his embrace.

"Divorce!—oh, Carter! I couldn't!"

"Why not?"

"I couldn't face the scandal. It would kill me! People might think horrid things with Charles getting a salary

from your company and all that, you know. And then there are the children. It wouldn't be fair to them. Besides—I've never thought that divorce was right. The church disapproves of it."

"Not on one ground."

"But I've no evidence, Carter. While I'm perfectly certain in my own mind about Charles, I could never prove anything."

"That's all right! I've got the evidence," he announced, watching the effect of his words. "I didn't want to tell you so until I knew just how you felt. And in fact we didn't get it until a day or so ago. You can have your freedom—and your children—any time you want them now, Enid!" He could not help marvelling a little at how soon they had got down to practical details.

She covered her face with her hands. She must not show her gratification.

"Oh!" she cried. "How perfectly terrible! Of course I always suspected—! But the knowledge is a shock. It makes me quite sick. And—oh, Carter!—I don't know that I like the idea of your having spied upon him!"

"I only did it for your sake—and because I loved you," he answered with glib conviction. "Besides, he is the assistant treasurer of the corporation of which I am the president, and we can't have our officers carrying on publicly. It might affect our credit. A lot of money passes through his hands. Getting tied up with a loose woman has started many a man toward the penitentiary!"

"Don't!" she begged. "Remember that you are speaking of—the father of my children!"

"I'm not likely to forget it!" he replied. "Naturally

I'd shield him in any way I could, but I owe a duty to our stockholders."

"Do you mean you intend to deprive him of his position?"

"My dear girl!" he said, "I shall see that he is well provided for. The main thing is to get rid of him. You needn't worry. I've got enough for all of us."

For a moment she did not answer. She must not yield too easily.

"I must think!" she said, releasing herself. "This is all so unexpected. You are asking a great deal of me, Carter. If I should divorce Charles on—on—statutory grounds it would disgrace the family—there would always be a stigma. I could never bear to go to court."

Blair slid back into his chair and lit a cigarette.

"You won't have to, my dear! There need be no scandal whatever. You can slip out to Reno or Boise City for a few months, get a decree on the ground of desertion, and no one need ever know you're divorced until it's all over and you're safely Mrs. Carter Blair."

"But suppose Charles refused?"

"He wouldn't dare to! He doesn't want a scandal any more than you do. Besides, if he was ass enough to refuse he would forfeit all claim to—consideration."

"But he might. He's a very obstinate man, as you know."

Carter felt sure now of his ground.

"He's a damned fool, if that's what you mean!"

She knew she had got him. He hated Charles. From now on, with her knowledge of men, it would be a simple thing to handle the matter as she liked. Only she must be certain that there should be no false step.

"Are you sure that the evidence is conclusive?"

"Positively and absolutely! My people are the best

in the business. Your decree is practically signed, sealed, and ready to deliver. All you have to do is to ask for it —or let me ask for it. I'll attend to the whole business. You won't have to give it a thought."

He paused and went on in a different tone.

"I know I'm asking an awful lot of you, Enid. I wouldn't dare to if I didn't love you as I do. I never thought I could love any woman so much!"

He leaned forward and clasped both her hands.

"You love your old Carter just a little, don't you? You won't be afraid to trust yourself to me, Enid?"

She let her hands stay in his, while two tears welled up into the corners of her eyes. After all, she really was somewhat upset and shocked by the news she had received and the prospect of what she must go through to achieve her end.

"I always trust you, Carter!" she answered tremulously. "But this means so much! Our whole future lives! You mustn't mind if I'm a little frightened. I must have time to think it over."

He raised her hands to his lips.

"Of course, dear. You do love me, Enid? Say you love me!"

She turned away her head as if to hide the shame of her confession.

"Yes—I love you!" she whispered; then, facing him with a smile in which sadness seemed mingled with a half-fearful joy, she said with an almost virginal diffidence:

"You may—kiss me, Carter."

She lay late the next morning, lazily watching the sunlight dappling the ceiling of her stateroom. A delicious sense of achievement permeated her. And not the

least element in her satisfaction was her consciousness of the subtlety with which she had brought cunning to the aid of beauty. She had wound Carter around her finger as she would have an unsuspecting child. Her brain was a worthy partner of her body. Had she met Blair twenty years ago she might have conquered the social world. Was it too late?

With his wealth it ought to be easy for him to buy an election to the Senate from some Western State with which he was already more or less identified. Arizona, perhaps. Or Nevada. Once in Washington she would carry everything before her. But first she must build up a solid social background in New York! They must stand for everything worth while, whatever was best. Newport, of course!

That was her glittering programme! A metropolitan social success, then politics, the Senate, finally perhaps a diplomatic post. They could probably get Rome,—at any rate Madrid. And as she dreamed and watched the undulating reflections upon the walls, the glare from the port-hole fell like a spotlight upon her small pinched face, revealing it as hard and haggard and thin-lipped, a cruel face upon which selfishness, jealousy, and greed had traced their signatures.

Unconscious that had Blair seen her at that moment he might have been inclined to leap into the water and swim ashore, she began to make her more immediate plans. It was of the utmost importance that there should be no scandal surrounding the divorce, which must be kept a secret until it was an accomplished fact. To that end Carter had better go away—it would only make him more eager. It might not be a bad idea for him to take the opportunity to look after his political fences in Arizona.

They must act only upon the soundest legal advice—if possible induce Vincent Pepperill to handle the case, which would give it an air of respectability. Every appearance of family harmony must be kept up. The children must be told nothing whatever about what was going on. Charles could probably be made to see daylight easily enough. But they must take plenty of time. Not go at it in a rush, as in some cases where everything leaked out even before the papers were served!

There was a whistle from the bridge followed by the sound of hurrying footsteps on the deck above, a bell rang somewhere below—once—twice—and she felt the throb of the engine.

The spots of sunlight began to slide along the ceiling. The bell rang again—then the jingle, and she felt the thrust forward as the yacht responded to the propeller. They were off! Enid realized that like *The Astarte* she had slipped her moorings, and was leaving harbor, bound for the open sea—a sea which, as she knew, might be either calm and smiling—or, if it chose, a raging tempest. But she felt no dismay, no trepidation. On the contrary, she was filled with a delicious exhilaration. The cruise of her life had only begun. To the children she might have to leave behind her and to their father whom she was about to abandon she gave hardly a thought. She was almost like a man in her complete absorption in herself.

CHAPTER VI

CHARLES had taken a great shine to Peter McKay—a situation not without its disadvantages to the latter, since their offices at the Calizona opened into one another. Charles had no conception of the value of time—his duties being nominal—while Peter, owing to Blair's absence, was swamped with work. For the past three years he had been the executive in charge of operations, and this included not only the camp at Oxide but those at Ajo, Nacozari, and Dawson as well. Now that he had been moved to New York there were daily telegraphic reports from all the different mines belonging to the company in Arizona, California, Sonora, and New Mexico, each presenting its own particular problem; and Peter, who knew the progress in every drift and tunnel, and the grade of ore profitable to work at the prevailing price, was required to take up each in turn and solve it by virtue of his peculiar knowledge and experience. It was a difficult and delicate task, a single decision often involving thousands of dollars, and it gave his mind little time to dwell upon his experience at "Folly Farm."

From where he sat at the president's desk he could look through the door into Kent's room, which much more resembled the lounge at Meadowbrook than a business office. The walls were covered with hunting-prints and pictures of teams of which Charles had been a member, while above the silver trophies on the mantel hung, under crossed mallets, a beautiful enlargement of a horse's head—that of "Sheridan," Kent's famous pony. Indeed, the directors' meetings of the Calizona, at which

Jerry Brookfield presided in his capacity of chairman of the board, usually began with some interchange relating to "the sport of kings" rather than the production of raw copper.

Brookfield had a profound affection for the old horse upon which his friend had scored so often against the British, and before calling the meeting to order was quite apt to look reminiscently at the fine upstanding head over the fireplace, and remark:

"There, gentlemen, in my opinion, is the greatest pony that ever raced after a ball!—Well, we may as well come to order."

Peter had passed the night several times at "the Mews," since, owing to Enid's absence, Charles was entirely alone.

"Funny how dependent you get on having your family around," said his host. "This thing of having your children away at school most of the year is a total loss. Don't seem right, somehow. Gay's always gadding about—you haven't met her, have you! And so is Enid. I understand she's going up to Newport to visit the Allyns almost as soon as she comes back from the cruise. Even the kids are always plunging around all over the lot. They do the damnedest things these days. Fancy! My sixteen-year-old Carlo says he's going to spend the summer acting as foremast hand on a lumber schooner running between Newfoundland and New York. And Babs insists on going to Labrador to work in an Eskimo igloo with that fellow Greenberg or whatever his name is. I holler a lot, but I really like it. I'm proud as Punch of both of 'em. They're a great pair! I'm a lucky man to have such children, Peter."

Peter, on his side, had become equally fond of Charles, who had gone on the wagon again—a sudden resolution.

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His business career had inflicted no strain upon his physique and left no mark upon his features, and once he abandoned alcohol he looked much younger. Coincidently, feeling the need of more active exercise, he had rented a hunter and taken to leaping fences on Blair's place.

One other factor which figured in his rejuvenation was a letter post-marked London, written upon the embossed stationery of the Hurlingham Club and signed "Trotter," the contents of which he divulged to nobody. He was going to keep that for a little surprise—especially for Enid. He also dug out his old riding and polo suits. After all, the game hadn't changed much. He even considered the possibility of his "coming back" enough to ride in some of the practice matches before the English team arrived.

Young Thorne, he declared, had the makings of a great forward. It was a shame he was losing all this time cruising around on a yacht when he might be getting into shape. A good kid! Whenever Kent talked polo or horses he became a different person.

"You've never seen Sheridan, have you!" he remarked one day as he intercepted Peter's glance at the pony's picture. "Why not sneak off an hour earlier this afternoon and pay him a visit? I've left my car at Jamaica. Afterward you can spend the night and help me out again. Beastly dull without the family. This 'my wife's gone to the country' thing isn't what it's cracked up to be!"

Peter assented and by five o'clock they were whirling along the turnpike toward Timmins' farm, where Sheridan had been put out to grass,—Charles at the wheel.

"You've had dogs, I suppose?" he hazarded, as he tooted anxiously at an absent-minded Airedale.

"Only one or two. You can't take a dog down ladders and he's apt to get mixed up in machinery."

"That's so. Never thought of it. A horse is different, of course."

They passed Meadowbrook, where Peter admired the smooth green velvet of the polo-field. A new and alert expression had come into Charles' stodgy face.

"Good field that!" he said. "Hard and fast.—I played there a bit once. Don't suppose you ever swung a mallet, did you?"

The acrid scent of the hot turf awakened memory in all his senses. He could hear the thud and gallop of oncoming hoofs, the sharp outcries of the players, the groan of the straining saddles, the crack of the mallets, and the panting of the ponies as they scattered, wheeled, and raced after the streaking ball. He could see Jerry Brookfield riding recklessly straight for the lines of spectators until they sprang to their feet. He saw the white helmets bobbing in the scrimmage, heard the clatter of the sticks as they fished among the bandaged ankles of the ponies, and Jerry's yell as the ball rolled free and he lifted his pony toward it. There were Darcy and the two Longwoods mixing it with Kerfoot and Cabot, and little Danforth on his strawberry roan with the white patch over the right eye.

Crack!

The ball was bounding toward a muscular figure on a dancing black, white with lather. Why, it was himself —"Charley" Kent! Good old "Charley" Kent! He could hear the cheers from the side-lines as he swung "Sherry" about on his haunches and flew after it, could feel the taut muscles vibrate in the animal's neck as they thundered together toward the goal-posts, man and horse a single co-ordinated mass of whalebone, steel, and muscle

driving on with an irresistible momentum. A blur of green turf flowed beneath and behind him. He could hear the sharp gasping of the roan as Danforth bore down upon him. He gave that peculiar little whistle through his teeth that Sheridan knew so well and could feel the pony throw himself forward in response. Go it, Sherry! On, old horse——!

"Look out!" Peter had grasped the wheel. "Excuse me, but you seemed to be aiming for that telegraph-pole."

Charles came to himself. The flaccid look had departed. His flushed face took on an expression of determination. He spoke with a briskness and a clearness of articulation with which Peter was unfamiliar.

At length they turned down a narrow lane, and stopped at the gate of a farmyard surrounded by irregular gray buildings tipped with cupolas and dove-cots. A fat woolly St. Bernard waddled toward them, coughing an asthmatic welcome. Through the open door of a shed Peter could see crowded together a mass of rickety vehicles—ancient buggies, decrepit phaetons, sprawling gigs, dilapidated skeleton breaks and station wagons, prehistoric victorias and landaus. A heap of rusty skeletons lay behind the shed.

"Tells the dismal story, doesn't it!" said Charles. "Here's where all the old traps go when they die. Timmins won't get rid of 'em. He's got some sentiment. That's why I keep Sherry here—because I know he'll be well treated.—Where's John,—Ezra?" he asked of an ancient gaffer who drove up that moment in a creaking farm-wagon.

"John's gone to the city, Mr. Kent," answered the old man. "No—there isn't any news! Git up thar, Roxy!"

They left the car by the silo and followed a cart-track through a patch of woods and up a hill, from the top of which they could look down into a sunny meadow on the other side. Half a dozen horses were grazing there and several others were lying prone.

"Ever wonder how old a horse has to be before he prefers lying down to standing up?" mused Charles. "I've never found out. Sherry hasn't got there yet."

"Which is he?"

Charles pointed to a distant solitary animal. None of the horses paid any attention to them. All were rough in coat, shaggy, and with bellies swelled from grass. The two men strolled toward where the old horse was cropping the stubble. Occasionally he would lift his head, whisk his tail, and stiffly move a step or two forward. At a distance of some thirty paces they stopped, and Charles made a clucking sound. Sheridan pricked up first one ear, then the other, and looked toward them with an air of inquiry, but the big eyes were without light.

"The poor devil has been blind these five years," said Charles. "Here, Sherry! Good horse, Sherry!"

Instantly the veteran whinnied, stretching his head in their direction; then came slowly toward them, ears alert, nostrils quivering.

"Good horse!"

Charles gently stroked the rough neck while the velvet muzzle thrust itself against his face and breast.

"We've seen some good times together, haven't we, old chap!" said Charles, laying his cheek against that of the horse. "Peter, there's one of the greatest ponies that ever lived! It's twenty-three years since I first threw a leg across him.—It breaks me all up to think he can't see me."

He held a lump of sugar to the big green-stained lips, and Peter saw that such teeth as were not missing were yellow and worn nearly to the gums.

"He can hardly chew! Still he loves his sugar!—But there's plenty of life in him yet!—Watch, Peter!"

He stepped back a couple of paces and, before the horse could follow him, gave a peculiar whistle through his teeth.

"Ps-st! Ps-st! Go, 'Sherry'! Lay to it, old boy!"

Sheridan stiffened into a trembling black statue, his head elevated and proud, his neck arched, his rheumy eyes in their red and sightless sockets open wide, his nostrils distended.

"Ps-st! Ps-st!" whistled Charles once more. And the old horse threw up his head with a succession of quick snorts and hammered the turf with his hoof. Charles put his arms about the shaggy neck.

"No use, Sherry!" he said. "You and I are 'has-beens'!"

Peter turned away with something hard in his throat.

"Nonsense!" he said after a moment. "Why, you're in the very prime of life, old man! Twenty good years before you at the very least!"

Nevertheless, he knew in his heart that what Charles had said was true—Sheridan and he were "has-beens."

He left the two friends together.

Charles overtook him on the hill. At the crest they stopped and looked back. Sheridan was still standing motionless, gazing after them with lifted head.

"Any fellow that tells me a horse hasn't got a soul is a damned liar. There's one of the best friends a man ever had! Sherry's always stood for everything that was decent in my life. I came near making a jackass of myself last week. Thank God, I didn't, though! And

do you know why? I got to talking with the woman about Sheridan and some of the big matches we were in—and it sort of brought everything back, you know —and, well, I just couldn't!"

Peter experienced an immense pity for this lonesome and unhappy man who in the hour of temptation had remained faithful to his ideals of sportsmanship. Was fate to deal him another blow that perhaps would destroy his faith in humankind and land him in the gutter? How low of Blair to take advantage of Charles's implicit confidence in his wife!—particularly ugly in view of Blair's business relationship to the husband he was betraying. It was not the first time that Blair had availed himself of his official position for such purposes. He had left an unsavory record behind him in Arizona. But he was a first-class copper man,—invaluable at handling labor crises,—and under his management the Calizona had increased its output and strengthened its financial position. Jerry Brookfield, who was the largest individual stockholder, greatly admired Blair, as Peter well knew.

Where did his own loyalty lie? A disclosure involving the president of the company with the wife of a fellow officer would disrupt the organization. His motive might even be questioned, for he was himself second to Blair in the hierarchy of officials, and would be his natural successor. He had known Blair far longer than he had Charles, and they had been through some tough times together—the Old Glory strike of '21, for instance—as a result of which Blair had made him general manager. They were friends of a sort—in more than a business way. Peter admired the bluff ruthlessness of a man who never bothered to deny anything but told the world to take it or leave it.

After all, what business was it of his? Blair was not

the only chap who was fooling around another man's wife. He naturally did not perceive that his real interest in the affair lay in the fact that the woman was Ursula's sister.

"Yes!" answered Charles after a pause. "My life ended when I quit the polo-field. My marriage was a fine fizzle. Although," he mused, "the chances at the time seemed all in favor of its being an exceptionally happy one! It's a mess either way, I guess. Look at Ursula! She ought to have married ages ago. You know how attractive she is! Jerry Brookfield was simply cuckoo about her. I think she was rather soft on him too. One of the 'Big Four,' and with all the money there is! Everybody thought they must be engaged. But she let him go and there she is living all alone by herself, when she might be mother of a family or adorning the court of St. James.—I was saying to Enid only the other evening she ought to marry Carter Blair."

"Blair!" Peter stopped short with his foot on the running-board.

"Yes, why not? He's rich, successful, a good fellow.—Got anything against him?"

Peter evaded the question by clambering into the car.

"Somehow I don't feel that he is quite up to your sister-in-law. Besides, his record out West wasn't particularly elevating so far as women were concerned. You know, don't you, that he has been married and divorced more than once, I believe?"

"Oh, that's ancient history!" said Charles, getting in beside him. "Anyhow, it's a shame that a fine girl like that isn't married. If you were a year or two older now—" He pulled himself up.

But Peter had not heard him. The mere suggestion that Carter Blair could be a suitable husband for Ursula

had made him sick. Was the fellow perhaps paying court to her, while dallying with Enid? A man like Blair would not be above it! The day was poisoned for him. He did not observe the familiar green-eyed monster that had for an instant showed its head. He did not realize that he was in fact deeply in love with the most beautiful and most gracious lady he had ever met; nor that she was in love with him. It never occurred to him that a woman of her beauty, her brilliance, her social standing could possibly condescend to one of his humble station, a half-baked mining-engineer on a salary of twelve thousand a year. If he ever married, and he thought of marriage even less frequently than in the past, it would be with a young woman, around twenty probably, in modest circumstances, who would sacrifice nothing in sharing his fortunes, and to whom his job as manager of the Calizona properties would seem equal to that of a prime minister.

The recollection of his first meeting with Ursula had faded away. He had taken her injunction literally, that their relationship henceforth could be only that of friends. As a woman she was to him an object of infrangible perfection; he never thought of her as a wife.

He had dreaded the change from Arizona to New York, where he felt strange and lonely, and already he had formed a tie that promised to enrich his whole life. "Folly Farm" seemed like home to him; her friendship like the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land; and she would always be there in the background of his new existence, wise, experienced, decorative,—the mature counsellor as well as delightful comrade,—a sort of exquisite elder sister, to whom he could go for help in any difficulty, and who might even some day or other assist him in the choice of a suitable Mrs. McKay.

She had again become for him the princess, the angel, far above earthly contamination—unattainable and hence undesired.

Not so Ursula! She no longer made any attempt to deceive herself with regard to her feelings. She did not idealize Peter. She loved him solely for what he was, definitely aware that for the first time she had found a man who satisfied her in every respect and upon whom she could lavish her love without reserve. She could hardly bear to wait until she should see him again, and during the week that intervened before his second visit forgot the existence of her other friends.

Saturday came at last—and how different was her attitude toward his arrival from what it had been on the first occasion. This time Ursula superintended the arrangements for his reception as if he were a soldier on leave from the front or a favorite son returning from college for a vacation. She would not leave anything to either Bessie or Nora but must personally see that there were magazines and flowers on his table, proper closet space for his wardrobe, and fresh soap in his bathroom. There was no electric light by his bed and she had the one from her room moved up there. She tried the shutters with her own hands to make sure that they worked properly and stocked the inadequate desk with stamps and writing-materials.

Every minute of his stay was planned for in advance. Lunch in the arbor, dinner on a little table on the terrace, tea in the orchard, a picnic on the hillside Sunday. With a truly feminine lack of morals she ordered Jim Curry to procure whiskey, gin, and vermouth—without asking where or how he could get them. In fact she fluttered about before his arrival, flushed with excitement, happy as a bride whose husband is returning

after their first agonizing separation of twenty-four hours.

He came! O blessed hour! How could he fail to interpret her heightened color, the misty look in her eyes, the tremulousness of her voice, as they walked in the grove behind the orchard, where the wood-thrush was calling in notes of liquid gold, and the veery answered on his silver flute.

They dined, as she had planned, in the twilight upon the terrace, and she watched him solicitously, delighted that she could make him comfortable. He was serenely content, glad to be there with her, and conscious of an affection which filled him with a grateful wonder.

"You are very kind to me!" he said, smiling at her across the shaded candles.

"But you have been so kind to *me*! Think of all the pleasure you've given me! I don't know when I've been so completely happy as last week!"

"It has been jolly, hasn't it!" he agreed. "I don't know when I've been so happy either. I guess I never have been. Nobody has ever been quite so good to me before."

His eyes wandered off through the smoke of a very expensive cigar.

"I don't suppose you can really understand what all this means to a wanderer like me. Why, I've gone months without seeing a woman, let alone talking to one. I've never in my life lived in a house as comfortable as this. Candles on the table, for instance! That doesn't sound like much, but it signifies a lot. You see, I've never had anybody—except my mother—who cared whether I came home or not. There's never been any one waiting for me! I used to wonder how fellows had the nerve to bring their wives out to the mining-camps. I know

now what it meant to have somebody. Not that it wouldn't be a dog's life for a woman if she'd been used to anything in particular."

"The right woman wouldn't give that a thought!" she answered swiftly.

"Do you really think that?" he pondered.

"I know it. All a woman wants who really loves a man is to be with him. Nothing else matters."

He shook his head.

"She might think so. But she'd have to love a man an awful lot to live in some places I've been to."

Her heart rebelled at his colossal blindness.

"Darling!" it cried. "Can't you see how I love you? I have been waiting for you all these years! Don't leave me, my beloved one! Take me with you! I will care for you, slave for you, die for you if need be! Only take me!"

Something of this no doubt shone in her eyes. With all his obtuseness Peter was aware that some disturbing element had unexpectedly entered into their relationship. He perceived that she was looking at him rather strangely, almost, he thought, resentfully. Could she imagine that he had been trying to hint—! Any such foolish supposition must be removed at once.

"You mustn't think—that I was trying to propose to you!" he said with an awkward laugh, avoiding her eyes. "What I said may have sounded that way—! But don't worry—you can bank on me to play the game without breaking the rules as you laid them down."

His words demanded a reply.

"I know I can," she answered. But her heart turned to lead.

Their evening was constrained; she knitted while he smoked—their attempts at conversation lying where they

fell. All her pathetic little plans had gone awry. He was aware that he had made a break of some sort, without knowing exactly how. Perhaps mentioning that sort of thing at all was bad taste unless the woman did it first? He cursed his blundering. But hadn't she done it first? He made a few vain efforts to brighten things up, but his stories held no savor; his anecdotes won from her only faintly polite smiles. They were at an impasse.

Still he floundered on. And all the time she was saying to herself as she kept her eyes fixed on her knitting: "It is my fault! I have built up this wall between us, myself. I am inside and he is outside, and the door is locked and I have thrown away the key! Oh, if he would only climb over or tear it down! But he won't! Soon he will go away!"

It was useless to try to read. They were hopelessly out of gear. At half past ten she laid aside her work, saying:

"I wonder what the weather is like!"

They went out upon the veranda. The moon peered at them like a sneak-thief through the screened window of the sky.

"There has been a change," he said. "I think it's gathering for rain."

They stood for a moment on the edge of the muffled night. No sound came from the swamp. The peepers were still.

"I suppose it's about bedtime!" he added presently.

His room was at the head of the stairs—opposite hers, and no sooner had his door closed than she realized what he meant to her. Not ten feet away, separated only by a quarter-inch panel of pine, so that she could hear his every movement—almost his breathing—was every-

thing life could hold. She lay rigid, staring at the ceiling and listening to his footsteps. Only that wooden partition stood between her and happiness! Why had she ever placed that false limitation upon their friendship? For the first time in her life she understood passion, and it terrified her. Was it shameless to love a man that way—who could not love her in return? Must she suppress her feeling for him, stifle it almost at its birth, lest it master her? Surely there was nothing wicked in loving anybody as she loved Peter! Dear Peter! With his funny, brown, scarred face, his lonely eyes, his uneven shoulders? Was she not entitled to live as much and as richly as other women—as Bessie, for instance? In another year or two she would be old and withered. Before very long she would not be there at all. No, it was not wicked! She was not ashamed. On the contrary she was proud, happy, albeit frightened. Come what might, nothing mattered but her love!

She tossed sleepless throughout the night and arose with smarting eyes, frayed nerves, and a weary head. Nevertheless, she met him at the foot of the stairs almost gaily. He responded, as he always did, in the most natural way in the world. The awkwardness of the evening before had dissolved with the morning mists. They were such good friends! A fine pair they made, agreed Nora and Bridget and Jim Curry, watching from the kitchen door as they swung along together through the orchard after breakfast.

The sky was rain-washed. In the fathomless zenith swam a few gray clouds with white luminous edges that dragged swiftly travelling shadows over the fields, darkening the tender green of the new wheat and the iridescent purple, green, and gray of acres of infoliated cabbages. It was a day for skylarks, but as there are none

on Long Island their functions were being performed by song-sparrows and swallows. It was warm, yet cool in the wind and shade—a day when it seemed that the human heart must cry out for very joy.

They walked all over the farm. They climbed the ridge and through field-glasses watched the sailboats on the Sound. They sat in the arbor and he talked about his plans for the Calizona, and how there might be something in this new variation of the sulphide process which would revolutionize the industry, and she listened eagerly without knowing what he was talking about or caring.

But all day under her surface light-heartedness ran the melancholy undercurrent of her realization that she did not figure in his prospectus save as an underwriter of friendship, that, however great his affection for her, his ideal of romance had not been changed by it. When he married it would be with a fresh young girl who could surely bear him children. And she did not blame him for it, nor love him the less for it. Her heart held no conscious resentment toward her unknown rival. The only thing that worried her was that there could be no young girl good enough for him. No young girl could possibly understand Peter as she did, or do for him what she could do!

It was a good day, and toward its end, when the shadows began to lengthen, they walked down into the valley to where the brook entered a stretch of woods. She had a book and Peter carried a basket, and here they picnicked on a fern-covered ledge that made a green platform in the white swirling waters. She had superintended Bridget's preparation of the contents—nothing fancy, "man's food" all of it—cheese, pickles, cold beef, bacon sandwiches, currant cake, apples. He ate like a man with nothing on his conscience, taking big mouth-

fuls, and making huge inroads upon the provender, that delighted her.

Afterward, while it was still light and he lay comfortably stretched out on the bank, smoking his pipe, she read to him from the "Oxford Book of Verse"—"Innisfree" again, and some of Keats and Henley, and Stevenson's "Romance," which he said he liked.

> "'I will make a palace fit for you and me,
> Of green days in forests and blue days at sea,'"

he repeated. "This is a 'green day,' isn't it? I shan't forget it! Or this last week, either!—Nobody could ever make a palace fit for you, Ursula!"

She was leaning against the boulder at his side, her head thrown back, the book open on her lap. At his words a grayness filled her eyes. She tried to speak, but her heart was too full. Her bosom seemed bursting. The noise of rushing waters in her ears was not the song of the brook.

Reverently he lifted her hand and touched his lips to the delicate tracery upon her wrist. The kiss of the man she loved but who did not love her was more than she could bear. All the emotions she had experienced the preceding night returned intensified and overpowering. A stifled exclamation escaped her.

"What is the matter, Ursula?" he asked without relinquishing her hand.

"Nothing, Peter."

"But there is something. What is it?"

"Not that I can tell you, Peter."

She squeezed his hand and then tried to withdraw hers, but he refused to let it go.

"Please, Peter!" she begged, and then as he still did not release her she lifted her other across her face and

began to sob like a little girl. He was greatly distressed. What could he have done?

"Don't, Ursula!" he protested and, not knowing what else to do, he got to his knees, reached his arm about her, and drew her to him. "Poor Ursula!" he said. "Please don't cry!"

She could not stand it. Helplessly, with her arm still before her face, she allowed her head to fall upon his shoulder. She could feel his cheek against her hair, smell through her fingers the scent of his Scotch tweeds.

"Dear Ursula!" he whispered, gently removing her arm from her face. He could feel her tremble in his grasp, feel the beating of her heart. How could he comfort her?

Twilight was creeping through the trunks of the oaks. The eddies were hung with wisps of gossamer. Over their heads the tree-tops were bathed in a golden sheen. His arm was encircling her, his hand clasped upon the soft rotundity of her breast. The world seemed very far away. She gave a quivering sigh, and let herself sink wholly against him.

"Like that! Hold me like that!—Oh, Peter!"

"Ursula!"

Their lips met and, as her arms stole around his neck and drew down his hot face to hers, he kissed her fiercely over and over again upon her eyelids, her cheeks, her temples. She lay in his arms, blissfully happy, her lips uplifted and inviting his caresses, her hair awry, her bosom rising and falling tremulously. She felt the palm of his strong thick hand pressing against her body, and she placed her own hands upon it and added their pressure to his. It seemed as if she could not press hard enough. Oh, blessed God!

"Now you know, Peter!" she gasped. "I love you!"

"And I you, darling!" he replied softly, kissing her once more. And then she felt a sudden tremor pass through him and a faint slackening of his muscles, as he made a half-hearted attempt to disengage himself, but she clung to him all the tighter.

"But I thought you said—that you forbade—" in his hesitation she read her doom.

"I did," she confessed frankly, "but it's been too strong for me, that's all! I tried to pretend that what happened at Enid's didn't mean anything, but it did, and I knew it. I shouldn't have let you kiss me that night, if it hadn't. I must have loved you from the moment I saw you. Do you love me, Peter?"

He murmured an assurance, but there was a look of anxiety upon his face wholly different from the one of utter happiness upon hers. He was palpably startled at the possible consequence of what had occurred both to him and to her. This sort of thing might lead anywhere. What had he done to arouse such passion? He could recall nothing.

"Come!" he said in a strained voice. "It will be dark soon. Let us go back to the house."

It was over! her first real moment of ecstasy. Her arms were reluctant to leave his neck, and she suffered him to place her on her feet before she let him go. Even then she did not wholly relinquish him, for her hands slipped down the sleeves of his coat until they reached his fingers and entwined with them. She stood there in the gathering dusk like a lovely ghost.

"Poor Peter!" she said. "Kiss me once more!"

Then picking up her book she walked proudly across the fields by his side, through the orchard to the house. The front door was open and the living-room lamps had been lighted. Jim Curry had taken Nora and Bessie

over to Hempstead in the Ford to the movies. Bridget, the cook, was spending the evening at the farmhouse with Mrs. Curry.

Ursula sat down on the chintz-covered sofa, Peter in a chair opposite her.

"Well?" she said with a tearful smile.

"I'm sorry!" said Peter humbly.

"Because I told you that I loved you? Oh, Peter!"

"It was my fault!" he insisted. "You didn't anticipate the possibility of such a thing as this any more than I did. But the situation has arisen. Perhaps I had better go away at once!"

"Go!" she asked. "Why?"

"Because," he answered slowly, "love with two people like ourselves can mean only one thing. You spoke hastily and impetuously. You may feel differently tomorrow."

"I shall never feel any differently!" she protested. "Oh, Peter! If you only knew!"

"But if you thought that deep as my affection is for you, it might not be the same——"

"Love is never equal!" she interrupted. "I don't ask that you love me as I love you; it is enough that I love you as I do. You may love me more or less,—in either case I am satisfied. A man loves many women, but we, poor things, aren't built that way. It's still a man's world, Peter!"

"But I do love you, Ursula!" he answered. "Only this has come so quickly, so unexpectedly!"

"Do you mean that you do not love me enough to want to marry me?" she asked calmly.

He was dazed—frightened. He had never felt for any other woman the affection that he felt for Ursula. Yes, he could truthfully say that he loved her. But mar-

riage—? It was incredible that she should really think of such a thing. If she did, it was but the offspring of a momentary impulse of which he had no right to take advantage. To-morrow it would be gone,—like that other impulse upon the night of their first meeting. And now that it was put to him, did he really want to marry—anybody?

All this she sensed instinctively.

"Don't worry so, darling!" she said. "Don't you see you are all I want, Peter!—I understand perfectly, dear. I've known it all along. I've not forgotten your idea of romance, Peter. I don't want marriage! If we love each other that is all that matters."

He had become white.

"You mustn't talk that way! You frighten me!"

"There is nothing to be frightened about, Peter!"

"You can't know what you're saying!"

"I know exactly what I am saying."

She took up a book bound in blue cloth that lay beside the lamp—Pater's "Renaissance"—opened it and read:

> . . . We are all *condamnés*, as Victor Hugo says: "We are all under sentence of death but with a sort of indefinite reprieve. . . . We have an interval, and then our place knows us no more. Some spend this interval in listlessness, some in high passions; the wisest, at least among 'the children of this world,' in art and song. For our one chance lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time."

She laid aside the volume and leaned forward clasping her hands in her lap. Her eyes looked through and beyond him, giving her face an expression of great dignity and sweetness.

"This is my one chance for happiness—the only one I shall have, for I never could love any one else as I

love you, Peter. You are all I care for in the world. Whether you want me or not, I am yours to take or to leave. I shall always be yours. I never could be any one else's. It is nothing to me whether you are my husband or my lover. Those are only words." She stretched out her arms to him, unutterably appealing in the soft light.

Ursula knew, as every woman knows, that she could look to her heart for her legal code and safely rely on what it told her; that, while it may be possible for a man to find an answer to the riddle of life in creative work or even in a search for mere beauty, it is not so for a woman, who can find it in love and in love alone. A man by his own efforts can win for himself the objects of his ambition—power, place, honor—but a woman cannot. It is her fate to depend for happiness on others, usually upon one other. Whether or not she finds it is a matter of chance. It may never be offered to her or it may be offered but once; and if it is offered, it may mean her social annihilation or physical death. For her it is cheap at any price. It is the law of nature and the tragedy of life that to gain happiness a woman must sacrifice herself. Yet in that tragedy, if that is what it is, she attains her goal, a sense of completeness, of being part of the eternal, that a man never knows.

Had Ursula been less lovely, her face less spiritual,—had he loved her less,—he might have yielded and in gross eyes thereby shown himself more of a man. Half the world, without regard to sex, will no doubt scoff at him.

"Ursula," he said in a voice that told of the struggle going on within him, "don't you see that I can't let you do such a thing as that? Make such a sacrifice! You are far too precious to me. I—I love you too much!"

"Is not that my affair?" she inquired almost with disdain.

The scar on his chin glowed livid against the dull red.

"Then marry me, Ursula!" he said, rising to his feet.

For an instant a "yes" quivered on her lips; then, as she recalled all that had gone before, her head lifted more imperially than ever.

"No!" she replied, also arising, and as she did so one of her gray gauntlets fell to the floor between them. "I only ask the chance that every woman takes who loves. All I want is my 'interval' of happiness."

In the presence of her love he hung his head. She was offering him everything without reservation. And he was holding back, why? Was it because, as he said, he loved her too much to tarnish her? Was it really because he feared for her future happiness? Was it because of his principles? Or was it simply out of cowardice and because he was unwilling to pay the price—surrender up his liberty, his serenity of conscience, his pride of rectitude? Was it decency or selfishness? Was he thinking of her or of himself?

For several seconds he did not speak. Then he bent over and picked up the glove. As he did so his glance fell upon the photograph of her in court costume that stood upon the table beneath the lamp,—the sweet, naïve, girlish face, with the three white feathers nodding above the quaint, so out-of-date head-dress. He could not tread those feathers in the dust!

With a definitive gesture he handed the gauntlet back to her.

"This is all utterly preposterous, Ursula!" he remarked in the tone he used at directors' meetings. He took out his bag of tobacco and began to fill his pipe. "It's quite mad!"

Her shoulders sagged with a sense of defeat.

"Is it?" she asked weakly, almost with indifference.

"It is!—Absolutely!" His voice had gained confidence as hers had lost it. He held a match to the bowl of his pipe and the tobacco flared. "We've got to forget all this!"

He stepped to the fireplace, threw in the match, and swung to the bookcase.

"Fine lot of books you've got!" he remarked, as he pulled out one of the volumes and examined it.

She waited until he had replaced it; then she said with faint irony:

"You'll find your favorite on the second shelf to the right—'The Martyrdom of Man.'"

CHAPTER VII

"SHE's got it!" Mrs. Allyn, looking up from the letter in her hand, swept the circle about the tea-table on *The Astarte's* after-deck.

"Who's got what, Teeny?" inquired Enid. "Have you enough cream, parson?" The appellation was the last little touch of intimacy between her spiritual adviser and herself. She really *couldn't* call him "Roderick"!

"Out of your abundance, dear lady!"

The rector of St. Timothy's smiled tenderly at his hostess. He had snapped back from New York on the "Owl"—the New Haven Sunday-night express—and rejoined the party, which now included Mrs. Allyn, at Marblehead in time for breakfast on Monday morning.

"Susie's got her divorce! She writes she's been successful all along the line—custody and control of the children, fifteen thousand dollars' counsel fee, and yearly alimony of twenty-five thousand."

"'Horse, foot, and dragoons'!" commented Mr. Pepperill.

"'Susie'?" queried the rector. "Is that Mrs. Godwin?—I think I married them. Yes! Of course I did. How long ago was it?"

"Oh, ages!" replied Teeny—"at least six years."

"Well, standing to lose twenty-five thousand a year if she marries again, it's a safe bet she'll get along without," decided Bob Morgan.

"Where did she get her decree?" asked Enid, whose interest in the subject had increased since her last interview with Blair.

"Was it foreign or domestic?" supplemented the architect.

"Home-made—copper-riveted! She says her attorney took her out in the country somewhere and she got it in a court-room over a grocery-store in eleven minutes. Nobody knew a thing about it! She says if anybody wants to get a divorce—there's nobody like her little man. I don't suppose anybody as distinguished as Mr. Pepperill would know that sort of a lawyer—Arthur B. Gantz?"

"I haven't the pleasure of Mr. Gantz's acquaintance," answered Mr. Pepperill dryly, "but I have no doubt he is as honest as he is able, and among the members of my profession a jewel without price!"

"Oh, his price is all right! Susie says he soaked her twenty thousand over and above his counsel fee."

Mr. Pepperill looked pained.

"That sort of thing brings the law into disrepute!" he remarked.

"It at least has the advantage of penalizing the applicant," said the rector. "If we are going to have divorce, perhaps it is well to have high license!"

"The Episcopal Church makes no objection to a divorce secured under the New York statutes," the lawyer reminded him. "You and I have often discussed that, Thrum.—It's only this Reno business!"

"What is the matter with the Reno business, as you call it?" demanded Blair, who had just emerged from the companionway. "Isn't a divorce obtained in Reno or Paris as good as any other?" His own had been secured in Phœnix, Arizona.

"Surely!" assented Mr. Thrum, who had in his pocket Blair's contribution toward the new reredos at St. Timothy's in the shape of a ten-thousand-dollar check. "The

church's recognition of a divorce does not depend in any way upon the jurisdiction in which it was obtained, but upon the circumstances. Where the defendant has been unfaithful the church accords full validity to the decree." The rector, feeling that he had skilfully avoided giving any offense to his host, yet apprehensive lest the topic might become embarrassing, arose.

"What do you say to a game of shuffleboard, Miss Gay? I feel the need of a little bodily exercise before dinner."

"Delighted. Suppose we take on Teeny and Carter?" Gay threw away her cigarette and sprang to her feet.

Enid saw them go forward with relief. Having, as she thought, just heard the church give its approval of her contemplated course of action, she now hoped to elicit the protection of the law.

Bob Morgan came to her assistance in this quite unconsciously.

"One doesn't hear nearly so much about Reno these days," he remarked, holding out his cup to her for more tea. "What has happened to it?"

Mr. Pepperill officially disapproved of divorce and held in professional scorn the low order of attorneys who got their living by delving in the muck of matrimony. His legal fingers and nails were far too carefully manicured and his legal cuffs much too well laundered to permit of his touching such a case himself. Yet, while, like most lawyers of experience, he had discovered that women were unsatisfactory clients, seeking consolation rather than advice and usually leaping before looking, he had not altogether escaped the obligation of advising them about their marital affairs—merely from gallantry, if nothing else.

"Yes," he agreed. "Reno's become rather déclassé.

Of course, it used to be the Mecca for people who wanted quick divorces,—still is, for that matter—but it's no longer as chic as it was. Rather vulgar, in fact.—Thanks, yes, I will have another cup. You see, a woman has to live out there and hobnob with a lot of other disgruntled women, many of whom have pretty shabby reputations, to say the least, and when finally she goes into court it's telegraphed all over the United States." He gave his characteristic, humorous little cough. " 'They order,' as Laurence Sterne said, 'this matter better in France.' "

"As they do many other things," assented Morgan. "But isn't there a lot of hocus-pocus about it?"

"Oh, I wouldn't want to say that!" returned the lawyer. "From one point of view, perhaps, yes. But you must bear in mind that they have an entirely different one over there. The French courts look at marriage much as they do at any other contract. If both parties want to dissolve it that's enough, so long as the children are taken care of. As a practical matter it's really easier than going to Reno and involves no publicity whatever. A man and his wife can cross the ocean on the same steamer and I've even known them to come back together after they were divorced. Nobody knows anything about it."

"But don't they have to be residents of France?" Enid tried to speak unconcernedly.

"Theoretically they do. Practically, not. That is to say, if a man and his wife are both in France when the proceeding is started the French courts aren't particular as to how long they've been there. They treat them as they treat anybody else,—as two people who are tired of living together and wish to be legally separated."

"Doesn't the husband have to swear he's legally domiciled in France?" asked Morgan.

"Certainly," answered the lawyer.

"Well, if a couple go over to Paris simply and solely for the purpose of getting rid of each other, how can they claim that they are domiciled there?"

Mr. Pepperill looked quizzically at the architect.

"Domicile is a matter of intention," he announced. "Besides, if a man is actually in Paris and swears he intends to live there, who is there to deny it? No one can prove he doesn't! You can't pry off his brain-cap and demonstrate that the intention isn't there. Unless there's some particular reason to the contrary his allegation is taken to be the fact,—*makes* it the fact, I may say."

"But doesn't the woman have to swear that she lives in Paris too?" There was a fine line between Enid's brows.

"There's no difficulty about that!" responded Mr. Pepperill. "A wife's domicile always follows that of her husband. She lives wherever he lives. If he lives in Paris, she lives in Paris; and, if he says he resides in the department of the Seine, or she says so and he admits it, that is all there is to it, so far as she is concerned. She couldn't live anywhere else but there!"

Morgan leaned back and stretched out his legs.

"Fearful and wonderful is the law!"

"Oh, that's nothing!" said Mr. Pepperill.

What she had just heard precipitated Enid's doubt into determination. With Thrum and Pepperill, leaders in their respective professions, behind her she could be absolutely sure of her position. She realized that she could never have brought herself to appear publicly as plaintiff in a New York divorce court—even if held over a country grocery-store, for—apart from the horror of subjecting herself to an insulting cross-examination

involving all sorts of odious suggestions—if she freed herself at the cost of tarnishing the family reputation many people would never speak to her again. It was absolutely necessary for her to keep on some sort of terms with her husband. He must be made to see that his interest as well as hers lay in a quiet and, relatively speaking, harmonious termination of the marriage bond in some distant place.

She could not afford to take any chances. You could not always tell which way the social cat would jump. Most of her divorced friends had been able to cast aside their matrimonial shackles without being much the worse for it, but in certain instances the result had been quite the opposite. Gertie Chanler had managed it successfully and so had "Teeny" Allyn—twice, and, although each, as everybody knew, was really the guilty party while posing as an injured plaintiff, both were universally received as if nothing had happened. On the other hand, there was Cora Banning, who had divorced her husband for cause but whom nobody would speak to—something about the children, Enid thought; and there were several others who had had a bad time of it.

Analyzing these different cases she found it impossible to rationalize the attitude of society. One woman would be ostracized for doing what in the case of others had been condoned; and where the parties were in fact made to suffer for their course the inequality of penalty was disturbingly arbitrary. Apparently it made a great difference whether you had been popular or not in the first place. If you had been kindly and generous in your own judgments and loyal to your friends—in fine, if people liked you—you could "get away with murder"; on the other hand, one who had a sharp tongue, a patron-

izing or condescending manner, any sort of arrogance, was made to pay the uttermost farthing of humiliation.

How could she tell what view the world would take of her own conduct in divorcing Charles after twenty years? She was no woman to view "the world well lost" for love. On the contrary, she would have regarded love as well lost could she but have gained a little of the world. She wished now that she had been nicer to the people whom she had needlessly snubbed. Gertie Chanler would be only too glad to get a knife into her; and there were a lot of old cats who, once her full purposes were known, would recall with salacious zest her various trips with Carter Blair. Never mind! When she was remarried she could afford to disregard them.

After all, there was nothing extraordinary about the affair so far as Enid was concerned, although it would have shocked Roman society at the time of Tiberius. In those days, while a man might put away his wife by merely handing her "a writing of divorcement," and his father, for political or financial reasons, might even arbitrarily order him to do so, it was regarded as *contra bonos mores* for a wife to try to rid herself of her husband. To this extent it may be said that we have made a distinct advance over the folkways of our ancestors.

In the secrecy of her cabin she had perused with eagerness the report of Blair's detectives. Certainly, if what they contained were true, the case was plain enough. Yet was it true? She shoved the furtive suspicion out of her mind. "The best in the business," Carter had said. Enid was not aware of the legal presumption of fact that among divorce detectives there is no choice. She would have given herself the benefit of the doubt in any event. Why should she question the honesty of a statement made under oath, even if the affiant were

paid handsomely to make it? If a jury would accept it, why not she? And anyway, the veracity of the detectives would play no part in the matter, for she would get her divorce in Paris where it would be granted as a matter of course on grounds of incompatibility. Surely Charles and she were highly incompatible in character!

How fortunate that Mr. Pepperill was one of the party! He could not refuse to advise her under the circumstances. He had, so to speak, advised her already. She and Carter agreed that she should take the first good opportunity to lay the whole matter tactfully before the old lawyer so that they could start proceedings immediately upon *The Astarte's* return.

The chance came the following afternoon when every one on board with the exception of Mr. Pepperill had decided to motor over to the Essex Country Club for golf. At the last moment Enid evolved a headache and retired to her stateroom, emerging three-quarters of an hour later to find The Law stretched on a steamer-chair, attired in white flannels, reading "L'Atlantide." It was sultry and an ominous cloud structure was creeping toward the zenith over the horizon.

Enid sat down silently and used her *sal volatile.*

"How's your headache, my dear?" asked the old lawyer. "Have you read this?" He lifted the book.

Enid answered the questions in their proper order.

"A little better, I think, thank you. It's much nicer on deck than in those stuffy cabins.—No, I haven't read it. It's one of those erotic French novels, isn't it? I don't care for them."

Mr. Pepperill laid down the volume.

"It deals with 'topic number one,'" he admitted. The old lawyer enjoyed a slightly risqué conversation with a pretty woman.

Enid, feeling that the conversation should be put upon a less frivolous basis, pressed her handkerchief to her temples.

"My headache is due simply to nervousness. I have been very much worried lately. Perhaps if I could get you to give me a little help it would go away."

Mr. Pepperill's manner changed instantly.

"My poor girl! What is the matter?"

"Charles has been treating me abominably!"

"Charles—Charles Kent?"

"My husband—yes."

Mr. Pepperill was "flabbergasted," to use one of his own favorite expressions. Charles, that steady old coach-horse kicking over the traces!

"I knew you would be shocked—just as I was," Enid hastened to add. "Not that I ever thought Charles a saint. No man is."

She laughed with a studied bitterness.

"And I suppose I could have continued to stand it as I have in the past—if it were not for the children. They are old enough now to be hurt by what he does. Recently he has made no concession to appearances whatever. As soon as I had gone away——"

"Do you mean that Charles has been unfaithful to you?" Pepperill demanded incredulously.

She bent her head.

"H'm!" said he. "What makes you think so?"

"I have the evidence. It's conclusive. Ever since we were out West last year I have suspected that there was somebody.—And now, of course, I know it."

"Appearances are apt to be deceitful, particularly in the case of a man as old as Charles."

"Charles is young for his age.—Besides, when he gets drinking he is quite irresponsible."

"But you are *holding* him responsible."

Enid perceived that she had slipped.

"I cannot let the father of my children flaunt his mistress in their faces, can I?" she asked tartly.

Mr. Pepperill rubbed his chin.

"Has he done that?"

"He has made no concealment. He has been seen in public places," she answered. "I must do something for the sake of the children. I owe it to them, however much it may cost me."

Something about the way she said it conveyed the impression of her insincerity. Mr. Pepperill knew Charles intimately, had known him for years,—just as he had known Enid. Charles might be a drunkard but he was no rake. His reputation was excellent, quite as good as that of his wife. Even if it were true——

"Don't you think it might be a great deal worse for your children if you divorced Charles and broke up your home than if you should forgive him? If, as you say, you have the evidence, you have a hostage for his good conduct in the future. There are worse things than infidelity."

Enid looked shocked.

"My self-respect——"

"Then why not a separation?—It has not the finality of a divorce. If he behaves you could let him come back."

It was not at all what she had expected, and not at all what she wanted.

"Perhaps if you read the evidence you might feel differently!"

"Where is it?"

She handed him the two typewritten affidavits. Mr. Pepperill glanced through them.

"Knowing Charles as I do, these strike me as decidedly fishy," he declared, looking at her. "You know what divorce detectives are! The courts have thrown out their testimony repeatedly when not fully corroborated by disinterested parties or other equally reliable evidence. If I were a judge I certainly would not convict a man like Charles upon such testimony; and if I were your lawyer I should not advise you to proceed without much more than what is set forth here. Of course it is true that I do not know the entire story. But if this is the whole case I think you could well afford to give Charles another chance. You have—apart from what you tell me about his derelictions—a happy family life. The three children adore their father. Your home is a delightful social centre. You and Charles have an excellent position in the community. A divorce would destroy all this. Few people realize the unhappiness which they invite when they take such a step, the disadvantage to the children, the inevitable odium and loss of prestige. It is a wretched business, Enid. I have heard many women say that had they known what was involved they never would have undertaken it.

"Another thing—if the truth were known—most divorces are secured not for the cause alleged but for some other and less creditable reason. I am not asking any questions. It is none of my affair, but as your father's old friend, as well as your own, I hope you won't act precipitously. Why not wait awhile? I shall be glad to act as an intermediary between you and Charles and to try to patch things up. Be slow in doing something which may seem for the best to you now—perhaps, even compulsory—but which in a year or so you may regret."

His eyes searched hers keenly.

"I'm an old man and, no doubt, rather a worldly one, but I've had an opportunity to see a good deal of the lives of other people, and I tell you in all sincerity that in my opinion easy divorce is doing more harm to the country than anything else. Don't think I'm preaching. I'm not. I've never been married and maybe I've no right to judge others who have. Anyhow, I'm not judging you, Enid. You are a good woman and your father's daughter, and I've no doubt whatever course you decide upon will be the right one."

Enid's mouth had grown very small. In view of Pepperill's easy jocularity upon the same subject on former occasions, she resented what she regarded as his presumption in lecturing her. The old hypocrite! It was clear that she would get neither encouragement nor assistance from him, and she was sorry that she had sought it. Carter could find her another lawyer easily enough. Who was that man who had acted for Susie Godwin—Mr. Gantz? She got up and held out her hand for the affidavits. Mr. Pepperill gave them to her and patted it.

"I suppose you're old enough to remember Mr. Punch's advice to those about to be married?"

"No," answered Enid acidly. "What was it?"

"'Don't!'" said Mr. Pepperill.

The rain had brought the golfers pelting back early and Pepperill caught the look that passed between Enid and Blair as the latter came up the gangway, and her infinitesimal gesture of negation. What a blind old bat he had been! Was he lending himself to an intrigue? Bad business! Bad business! Thank God he was a bachelor! Yet he knew in his heart that, had he been ten years younger, only Ursula Weybridge's final "no" would have kept him one. How different she was! But

what did any man know about women? The ones you least suspected——!

A blobby mist had enshrouded *The Astarte*. Mr. Pepperill paced the deck under the awning until it was time to dress for dinner. To-morrow they would be starting for Rockland, the eastward limit of the cruise. The New York express had not yet been put on, and there would be no comfortable way to return home by rail, if he found it expedient to do so. The president of his biggest client and the wife of its assistant treasurer! Bad business! He was devoted to Charles. Even if the latter had slipped, what a monstrous shame to involve the entire family in scandal! He did not really like Blair; he merely made use of him. Hadn't he heard something about the fellow in Arizona?

By eight o'clock the rain had become a steady downpour reverberating upon the deck-awning as upon a kettle-drum.

"Guess we'll have to stay here until the weather clears!" said Blair, as they got up from the table. "Bridge, I suppose?"

This time he and Enid paired against Teeny and Bob Morgan, while Thrum and Pepperill sought the smoking-room. On the quarter-deck James and Gay sat cross-legged among the cushions of the stern-sheets.

"I certainly hand it to you, Jimmy!" said the girl. "The way you took it from Carter this afternoon! He acted like a bum!"

"He is something of a rotter!—As if anybody cared a damn about a measly game——"

"But he was so rude to you!"

Jimmy grunted and pushed the tip of another cigarette against the glowing end between his lips.

"That's nothing. He just gives himself away. You've got to make allowances. Besides, we're his guests."

"Guests of a swine!—I bet he'd be making love to me if you weren't here!"

Darkness prevented Gay from seeing the look upon the boy's face.

"Well, a lot of good it does me!"

"Don't be an ass, Jimmy!"

She threw her butt violently over the side.

"I don't know where I stand with you at all, Gay! Don't you like me a little bit?"

She squashed his arm against hers.

"I adore you, Jimmy dear!—Give me another Dromedary!"

He gave her one, growling. How was it possible for him at the same instant to long both to crush her to his heart and to hit her with an axe!

"What I want is for you to marry me."

"Why?"

He hesitated, pondering the question.

"Because I want you, I guess."

"That's a hell of a reason for getting married these days!—Marriage is an economic arrangement entered into——"

"Oh, I know all that stuff. It confers a 'definite social status' and so on and so forth. Are you proposing that I hire an apartment for you?"

"No-o-o," she mused. "I was merely wondering if there was any real reason why a boy like you and a girl like me ever should marry? In the first place I'm fully able to support myself. Blondel & Bates have offered me five thousand a year any time I'll come in with them. Five thousand!—Count it!"

"Guess I never will! Best offer I ever got was an even split on brokerage commissions.—A stinking business!"

"Well, I've no intention of supporting you."

"You wouldn't have to. I've got forty thousand a year now and when my Uncle James dies I'll have——"

"Do you suppose I'd marry you for your lousy money?" she flared.

"Doesn't look as if you'd marry me for any reason! If there is one, you've only to mention it!"

Gay leaned back and elevated her slender legs over a deck-chair.

"Well, economically speaking I don't need you. My 'social status' is all right. I'm having the time of my life. It'll be all over in a couple of years. You might drop around again about that time. If I got married now nobody would look at me."

"*I* would!" earnestly.

"I'd be bored to death with your old face inside of six months!" she declared.

"You wouldn't have to see me unless you wanted to."

"I can do that now!"

"But, Gay!—Don't you—don't you want—to—*get married?*"

"Do you mean do I want to raise a crop of little polo-players?"

"You wouldn't have to, would you?"

"Well, then—" she asked.

"Dammit!" he cried, turning furiously at her. "You make me tired. Sometimes I want to strangle you!"

"I thought you were crazy about me!"

"I am!"

"Then what's it all about?" she inquired.

"Damn if I know!" he mumbled as she snuggled against him.

Mr. Pepperill, who had come up for air, discreetly turned his footsteps in the direction of the bow. What sort of a ship was this anyhow? The bridge was over,—

Teeny and Bob Morgan dividing three hundred and sixty dollars between them. "Count it!" Thrum had retired to his cabin long ago. The skylight of the saloon had been raised a couple of feet to permit of ventilation, and as he strolled forward Mr. Pepperill was able to look far down into its polished and upholstered fastnesses. It was empty save for two people standing at the other end. Pepperill saw Blair take Enid in his arms.

CHAPTER VIII

URSULA, face down upon her bed—with her handkerchief between her teeth, had sobbed away the entire night. Was this to be the end of her wonderful friendship with Peter? Was it her fault that her idyl had crashed? Or was it fate? Could not men and women ever be close friends without this overpowering force intervening to destroy the tranquillity of the relationship? Could it be wrong to love a man as she loved Peter? Never had she felt either so happy or so uplifted! And now with a single word he had swept everything away. Why? What had she done that must needs be so condemned?

She tried vainly to understand, but she was unable to get his point of view. After all, as she had declared, it was her own affair. She was making no sacrifice! She was giving nothing that she was not getting. What she did could affect nobody but herself—and him.

Was it possible that when the moment came he had distrusted his affection for her? It could not be that! Or was it that he did not want to become entangled with a woman older than himself,—with any woman perhaps? She had watched his struggle and she knew that it was not that. He had acted honestly for her sake as he supposed. For her sake! Must he stand as the arbiter of her conscience? Was she not a free and independent human being? No, it was his New England conscience that raised the forbidding finger of a misguided and sterile philosophy against anything that made for earthly happiness.

Of course she respected him for being true to his principles, even if she could not share them, but what a poor consolation that was for her starving heart! Must she give him only her respect, when she yearned to give him herself? Perhaps, she thought, if I show no resentment at his having humiliated me so, things can go on just as they were before. Yet she knew that nothing would ever be the same. She must steel herself to the inexorableness of her fate, be a good sport, play out the game. And she could,—just as other women had.

"I suppose this is 'good-bye,'" he said as they stood together on the veranda, while his taxi panted spasmodically at the foot of the steps. "Don't you think it would be better if we didn't see each other for a while?"

She was glad that he did not try to appear casual or indifferent.

"As you prefer," she replied. "Don't worry about me. I'm all right. What happened was rather a whack, but I shall get over it. I should hate to have that prevent our being friends."

"But can we?—We've tried that once."

How could he be so coldly argumentative when she was burning?

"The same thing won't happen again," she reassured him. "You can be sure of that."

He stood looking down at his Panama and twisting it in his hands.

"I'm just trying to be sensible, you know."

There was bitter irony in her voice as she said:

"Quite right. It's those that are not who get those that are into trouble!"

"Ursula!" he besought her.

His tone of reproach was more than she could endure.

"Oh, go away! Please go away!" she cried, covering

her face. "I can't stand this any longer!" And she ran into the house.

"You got less than ten minutes!" admonished the driver.

There was just time to catch the train; none to pursue and attempt to comfort her. It did not occur to him that it was more important to stanch the wounds of a woman who loved him than to reach his office at the appointed hour. Feeling anything but a hero Peter climbed into the taxi. He could see no sign of her anywhere when he looked back.

He tried unsuccessfully while going in on the train to rationalize his conduct of the night before.

The suggestion of marriage had been swept aside,—if in fact it had ever seriously entered into the situation. They were not the same age, he was not her social equal, could offer her nothing, it would have been a doubtful experiment. Anyhow he had asked her and she had refused him. That was settled.

But why, on the other hand, when she had asked merely for love, had he refused? Was it not, as she had alleged, her affair? Was it not for her to weigh the cost and, if she saw fit, to pay the price? Were not the possible consequences considerations which she in her discretion was free to disregard and in disregarding which she would even have shown herself the captain of her soul? What business had he to presume to decide these questions for her? Was he in fact with all his heroics, his "I love you too much!" his "I could not love thee dear so well loved I not honor more," his thrusting aside temptation "for her sake,"—was he anything more than a pusillanimous Joseph?

It is true that his state of mind had been complicated by an inherited Puritanism, closely akin to cowardice,—

as well as by the complete surprise of her disclosure, which, with marriage out of the picture, had startled and even rather shocked him. But the basic reason for his refusal was a fear lest she give herself to him under a possible misapprehension of his true feelings toward her, or under the influence of an overpowering emotion that had swept away her reason and of which he could not honorably take advantage.

Yet Peter knew perfectly well that her love, great as it was, had not blinded her reason or swamped her powers of control. His gesture of protection had been both gratuitous and presuming, as well as justly susceptible of being misconstrued as circumspection. It would have been different in the case of a young girl overpowered by passion,—a girl of eighteen, twenty, or even twenty-five,—but not in that of a mature woman like Ursula who, though innocent and sexually ignorant, knew what she wanted, perceived the full consequences of the step she contemplated, and was prepared to take whatever chances were involved. This was the fallacy of his position and the cause of his uneasiness.

Peter had idealized Ursula as most American men idealize the women whom they love, and, since with men romantic devotion and physical passion can be kept separate and distinct, he was capable of controlling his conduct by abstractions. This Ursula could not do. True love, in the case of women, inevitably connotes passion,—albeit passion sublimated and glorified; while men in love are still able to realize what they are doing and to count the cost. Thus, the very idealization of a woman by a man often places her in a cruel and unjust relation to him, for his ability to reason under such circumstances must seem to her a lack of love, especially when he acts upon it to her deprivation.

And, since women in love can no longer govern themselves by reason, they are always at the mercy of the men they love, even if the latter do not love them. Nevertheless, to the honor of the sex which is traditionally supposed to be wholly ruthless in such matters, let it be said that there are many men who will not knowingly steal love from a woman any more than they would take money from a child. Such men may be neither Baptists nor buccaneers.

Ursula strove by picking up the threads of her acquaintance, which she had temporarily dropped, to fill the void Peter's defection made in her life. She had always been much sought after, and having motored over to Diana Kayne's for lunch she found herself quickly drawn back again into the social current. No use crape-hanging! When Jerry Brookfield hailed her across the bridge-tables later in the afternoon, she threw him a kiss.

"Dated up for to-night?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"May I sign on?"

Why not? She could not abandon all her friendships just because she was hopelessly in love. In time she might even bring herself to forget Peter. Yet all the time she was dining with Brookfield she was thinking how much she had rather be dining with Peter; and this, had the latter but known it, was something of a compliment—for the debonair, if slightly world-weary, Brookfield was generally regarded as the most attractive man of his age on Long Island. He said she looked as if she needed cheering up and insisted on trying to get tickets to a revue. Stopping at the club where he had ordered them sent, Brookfield was confronted by Peter coming disconsolately out.

"Hello, McKay! What's the matter? You look as if you had lost your last friend!"

"I have!"

"Well, come along to the 'Scandals' and save my life! I've got a box—eight whole seats. You can occupy six. I won't tell you what it cost me!—Motor's waiting, sir!"

Peter accepted good-naturedly. He liked Brookfield better than any man he had yet met in New York,—a new type to him,—shrewdly cynical, yet gallant, good-natured, and unselfish.

"Hop in!"

Brookfield pulled open the door of the taxi and shoved Peter ahead of him.

"Miss Weybridge—allow me to present Mr. Peter McKay, the coming Copper King of Calizona."

Peter felt the blood rushing to his forehead. What was Ursula doing there with Brookfield? He recalled what Charles had said of their former intimacy. Well, she had not lost much time!

"Hello, Peter!" she said in her customary cheery tone. "This is an unexpected pleasure!"

Peter, hiding in the shadow at the back of the box, gloomily watched the woman whose love he had just refused, as she laughed and chatted gaily with her host. This was a new Ursula—not his. Brookfield's, perhaps! Yet only twenty-four hours before she had professed her undying love for him! Women were strange animals! What was the use of worrying about them when they were like that? He'd see her constantly if he remained with the Calizona. Suppose she did whirl around and marry Blair—or something! She was unbelievably beautiful in the blaze of the footlights. Could she be over twenty? And as he watched her thus apart, en-

grossed in a man other than himself, he became aware for the first time that he desired her more than anything in the world.—Of course it was her own business!——

The curtain fell. Brookfield, cigarette-case in hand, excused himself in order to speak to a business acquaintance in the audience and Peter was on the point of taking the vacant seat beside Ursula when she arose and joined him in the back of the box.

"Poor Peter!" she said. "Don't look so dismal! I'm glad to have met you again so soon. I was just going to write you a letter—" she looked to see if any one was within ear-shot—"to tell you how fine I think you were last night. Even if I don't entirely get your point of view, I respect you for holding to your principles. We're still friends, you know!"

Her generous forgiveness was like a glass of wine to him.

"You're a good sport, Ursula!" he said.

"A woman has to be!" she replied. "You couldn't—being what you are—have done anything else. It doesn't matter. Everything will be all right. You'll see."

He raised her hand to his lips and she let it lie in his.

"There!" she said in a relieved tone. "You do see! Everything is going to be all right. You'll find me the same old Ursula you used to know. You'll have nothing to be afraid of."

Before Brookfield's return it was agreed that there was absolutely no reason why he should not spend the following Sunday with her at "Folly Farm."

The sight of Peter's unhappiness had been too much for Ursula. But the next day, when she had had time to think it over, she did not see how she could have asked him down. Once out of his immediate presence resentment again took the place of pity, and she felt her

humiliation and chagrin as keenly as ever. Her pride had been cruelly hurt. Yet their meeting at the theatre had followed so close upon their parting that she had yielded to a natural impulse to try to set things right again, and to make amends for his abrupt dismissal of the morning. She did not want to make him suffer for doing what he thought was right, even though he had made her suffer a thousand times more. Nevertheless, her accidental meeting with Peter and the prospect of seeing him so soon made her resolution to forget him in new activities seem superfluous. After all, the proposed hiatus in their friendship had been his idea, not hers; and now that he had consented to renew its continuity she found herself thinking as much about him as before.

As Saturday approached she began to wonder if she had acted wisely. Would everything be all right, as she had assured him that it would be? Would she, loving him as she did, be able to suppress the evidence of her feelings? She saw now that she had been over-confident in what she had told Peter at the theatre. They had been through the fire, but were the ashes in the crucible wholly white? Was it true that Peter no longer had anything to fear from her? It had been easy enough to say so as she sat there with her hand in his, for the moment almost happy. But now that she was away from him she perceived that it was going to be very hard to be "the same old Ursula" he had first known. Had there ever been any other Ursula? Had she not loved him from the first moment that their eyes had met at Enid's? —when, upon the point, she had invited his kiss?—when he had paid his first visit to "Folly Farm"?—when they had spent that marvellous first week together?—when he had come for the second time and, relying upon her

assurances that they could be nothing more than friends, had found himself plunged into a complicated and difficult situation? Were her present promises worth a penny more than those? Was she not doing the same thing right over again, and unconsciously—even consciously, perhaps—setting a trap for him to walk into?

As her mind dwelt upon the experiences of the preceding Sunday evening there developed a profound distrust of her own powers of self-control. If anything happened this time he would be justified in breaking with her forever. He would never trust her again or believe anything she might say. Was it too late to call the whole thing off, or at least to postpone his visit for another week or so? —But she could not bring herself to face the latter possibility, so much did she want to see him again. No, she would let him come down, but she would keep an absolute check upon her emotions. This time she *would* be cool, as she had the best of reasons for being. Poor Ursula! Still the prey of love, she must pretend that love was dead!

Saturday was sultry and oppressive, the clouded glass over the sun's face seeming to magnify its heat. From where Ursula sat upon the veranda the quivering countryside fell away toward the Sound, until it was lost in a gray haze. Now that Peter was almost there she was one moment elated, the next depressed. "He is coming!" cried her heart. "I shall see him again in a few hours!" but her mind answered dully,—"What if he is? He does not love me! All the joy is over!" She wished that she had been strong enough to forbid his coming.

The air from the garden was like that from the mouth of an oven, but her finger-tips were cold. Suppose he were to appear there now, arrive unexpectedly from the station,—what should be her attitude toward him? She

was not ashamed of her love, but she was ashamed of having lowered herself, without reason, in the eyes of the finest man she had ever known. Bitterest thought of all, she had made her own rules and then deliberately violated them, and now she was being penalized. Peter's offer of marriage, she knew, had been a gesture. She could not have done otherwise than to refuse it. Well, from now on she would play fair, no matter how much it hurt.

She would accept his point of view and act as if nothing had happened. She owed that to him. He had been true to his ideals; had run absolutely straight; had, as he believed, protected her from herself. For that she must respect, even if she did not thank him. She saw how selfish she had been. She had not thought of him at all! If she really loved him, instead of luring him on into an affair with her she should have shielded him from it! She would make any such thing as that henceforth utterly impossible.

Yet her resolve to maintain a coldly detached attitude toward him did not prevent her putting on her most fetching gown and making herself as attractive as she could. She must not be on hand at the moment of his arrival. It would not do to appear to be waiting for him. On the contrary, she would go for a walk and let him cool his heels a little. That would start things off on a perfectly matter-of-fact basis. She might even treat him rather coldly at first.

CHAPTER IX

PETER had been too busy to spend much thought upon his future relations with Ursula, although he was relieved to have the affair patched up and to be going down to "Folly Farm" again. He was glad that it was still his to go to, and he felt very tenderly toward its mistress as the taxi climbed the hill. She would be waiting for him at the door, probably.

But as they swept into the circle he could not see her anywhere. He paid the driver, lifted out his valise and stepped inside the hall. There was no sign of his being expected. Somewhat annoyed, he rang the bell.

"Where is Miss Weybridge?" he demanded of Nora.

"She left word, sir, if anybody came, to say she had gone for a walk, but would be back almost immediately."

"Does she expect me?"

"I think so, sir. She said there would be one extra for dinner."

His reception struck him as rather casual, all things considered.

"Did you wish to go to your room, sir?"

No, he would not go to his room! He would sit on the terrace until Miss Weybridge returned.

"Miss Weybridge has ordered tea, sir."

Slightly mollified, Peter took a cigarette from the silver box on the sitting-room table and stretched himself in a chair. How long was he to be kept waiting? He might as well unpack. Still smoking his cigarette he followed Nora up-stairs.

The doors of both rooms were open and before entering his he glanced into Ursula's. So that was what a

woman's room was like! On the dressing-table, with its triple mirror, stood a bowl of freshly cut roses, and beside it were arranged her brushes, comb, and other toilet articles. Lying over the back of a wicker arm-chair was a filmy dressing-gown of silk, frothy with lace. Beneath stood her bedroom slippers, their narrow toes pointing directly at him. It was almost as if she were still there—as if she had been drawing the big comb through her hair and had just laid it down.

The sight of these simple objects aroused in him feelings that he had never before experienced, of which not the least pronounced was a guilty sense of taking advantage of her absence to invade her privacy. Yet he could not tear his eyes away.

There was the cheval-glass where she stood and primped! There was her desk with all her papers just as she had left it. A narrow cabinet, with a glass front and shelves, held rows of evening slippers of different colors and materials—silk, gold, and silver brocade, satin, cut velvet, cretonne. How could one woman ever use so many! Could that be her dress for the evening—already laid out on the back of that chair—that handful of chiffon, lace, and silk? Was that all she wore? No, not all! Two little beribboned piles lay upon the bed. How diaphanous everything was!

How different a woman was from a man! They were constructed of the same materials, weighed approximately the same number of pounds, ate the same food, and breathed the same air—yet! Opposite the door was her bed, covered with a delicate counterpane of lace that sagged slightly in the middle, and at its head a heap of small pillows of different shapes and sizes covered with needlework. Peter stood there for fully a minute. The air was full of the scent of roses, and of Ursula.

He breathed deeply once, then turned and took the two steps necessary to reach his own room.

From the window he caught sight of her coming slowly up through the orchard. She was sauntering, pausing now and then to look about her, and he noted the erect fulness of her figure and the long swing of her stride. He waited for her to reach the house before descending.

"Well!" he said, as he met her in the hall. "Hello!"

"Hello!" she returned.

Her voice was politely impersonal, her manner wholly self-contained as she gave him a rather limp hand. "It's been hot, hasn't it! But I think it's getting cooler, don't you?"

The colorlessness of her greeting, its entire lack of enthusiasm or of intimacy, struck him as hardly justified.

"A lot cooler!" he answered, looking at her with intentness. "The coolest I've known here yet!"

That she disregarded his deliberate taunt, only nettled him the more. She reached to the silver box.

"Cigarette? Oh, you have one!"

He looked at her, puzzled by her new manner.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Are you angry with me about anything? Have I done anything to annoy you?"

"Dear me, no!"

"I can't say you seem very glad to see me!" His touch of arrogance had disappeared. He was reproachful now. She had difficulty in holding her pose.

"I am delighted to see you.—I always shall be."

"Something's the matter!"

"Perhaps you're hungry—" She broke her sentence in the middle. "Will you have some iced tea?"

He did not want anything cold and said so emphati-

cally. But what did he want? To eat his cake and have it too? Certainly there would be nothing in this sort of a lackadaisical acquaintanceship for either of them. She had been so cordial at the theatre! Now he might be a book-agent, as far as she was concerned!

They passed the evening in a fruitless attempt to get on a solid ground of mutual understanding, but their talk was palpably artificial. She inquired politely and with intelligence as to business conditions and learned with thrills that copper had gone up a cent and a quarter a pound, that they had put in sulphide at Jawbone, a new crusher at Oxide, and were now working the eighteen-hundred-foot level at Old Glory. Calizona Hill was nearly razed. It was hard sledding, but they managed to keep up a sporadic conversation until nearly ten o'clock. The task she had set for herself was proving incredibly difficult.

"Are you sure you're feeling well?" he demanded suddenly.

"Oh, yes! Perfectly! Thank you!"

The air seemed charged with a high-powered current that emanated from him, playing ominously about her. She tried to avoid his eyes, realizing that she was on the defensive. They frightened her.

"You're not the same!" he said sharply.

She tried to smile. The effort was a pitiful one.

"How can I be?"

"But you said we were to forget all that happened! Be just as we were before—friends!"

"Yes—aren't we?"

He laughed with rude irony.

"A lot we are!"

Across the Sound a flash of heat lightning flickered along the horizon. The trees were motionless. Nature

was holding her breath. The atmosphere had suddenly grown so oppressive that Ursula felt as if she were being smothered. The vault above seemed to have lowered itself like a diving-bell toward the earth, compressing the darkness about the house to which no sound penetrated except the quick breathing of the man and the woman. They were in there together, sunk beneath the surface of life, the sport of unseen waves and currents, which, foaming and roaring far above their heads, swayed and tossed them helplessly about.

"I am trying to be exactly as you want me to be," she said, speaking with an effort—as if the silence were a non-conductor. "I see now that everything you said was absolutely true. We aren't that kind of people! Men are stronger than women. I shall be grateful to you always. You are a good man, Peter. There are not many who would protect a woman against herself, as you did me. I was carried away for the moment—but it will not happen again. There is nothing to worry about. From now on you will find that I shall be quite harmless!"

"I see that already!" he said. "But—" and his voice grew thick "—you've got to be a little kind to me, Ursula! You oughtn't suddenly to treat me like a dog. It—it's hardly fair! You began it, you know!"

In spite of the fear that weakened her, his words tore away all her defenses. She could not hurt him so cruelly! She thrust forward her hand, and he took and held it, tingling in his. Something leaped across the span and coursing through her veins ran back to him. Her fingers drew quickly down on his and then away. Unconsciously she gave a faint sigh.

A ripping noise ran across the protesting sky and merged in a distant rattle of thunder. A breath of fresher

air tossed a rain-drop or two through the open doorway.

"Looks like a storm!" he said in an unnatural tone.

"I hate lightning!" she answered—but it seemed to him as if she were speaking in a foreign language. The night outside was like soot, the air as heavy in their lungs.

The electric lights dimmed and two fiery rivulets trickled down from the zenith. Greenwich was being cannonaded. A wild pelter flung down on the veranda roof and at once the leads began an intermittent gurgling.

"There's nothing to be afraid of!" he said, but the words sounded to him as ominous as the rumbling overhead. The wind whisked through the doorway and dashed a fine spray into his face. It sent Ursula's skirt ballooning above her knees. She pulled it down with one hand and held her hair with the other. At the same instant there was a vivid lightning-flash and the full force of the storm burst over the valley.

"We must close the door or everything in the room will be blown to pieces," said Ursula, letting go her skirt and jumping to her feet.

He made no move to help her but stood anchored where he was, unable to take his eyes from her face, as she threw herself against the rain and wind, which wrapped her skirt tight about her limbs. The wildness of the storm outside seemed to have communicated itself to him. The wind tore a tendril of Ursula's hair from her forehead and sent it flying behind her. She turned her back to the door and by thus securing a better purchase, attempted to close it. Half-frightened, half-laughing, her cheeks glistening, her lashes fringed with moisture, she leaned against the door with her bare

arms outstretched, her head thrown back. The wind was getting the better of the struggle.

"It won't shut!" she gasped.

Her cry released him from his stupor. He leaped just in time and, putting his arms on either side of her, forced the door to. They were face to face, breast to breast. He ceased to be conscious of his actions. Holding her prisoner and without altering his position he kissed her hard upon the mouth, then almost deliberately took her in his arms and crushed her to him with cruel fierceness, burying his face in the soft coolness of her neck and bosom as she hung there, neither avoiding nor encouraging his embrace, while the thunder pounded overhead and the water splashed from the flooded eaves.

"Gluck!—Gluck!"

The uncanny character of the sound brought him to himself. The gods were making sport of their puppet, haw-hawing in the heavens, chuckling in the drain-pipes. He saw himself committing an assault, not only upon her, but upon his own ideals. So this was what his hand was worth when it came to a show-down! The Baptist got the better of the buccaneer. He started to release her but his arms held a dead body. She had not moved a muscle of her face or limbs. He dragged her to the sofa and she sank into it, letting her head fall back against the cushions.

"Ursula!" he called, as if she were a long way off.

At his voice she shuddered and raised her hands half in appeal and half in protest.

"No, Peter! No!" she cried with a frightened sob.

"Ursula!" he called again. "Open your eyes! You must pay attention. I didn't know what I was doing! I apologize—humbly."

She opened them for an instant, but they were focussed,

if at all, upon some point beyond the material world. Then she closed them once more.

"No!" she said wearily, and to herself as much as to him. "Not that!"

The fury of the storm had passed over the house and the thunder was rolling off up the valley.

"I was mad!" he agreed. "I had better get out." He hesitated.

"Oh, no! Not in this fearful rain. Please give me a cigarette."

He handed her the box and lit a match for her.

"The storm is about over, I guess," he said.

He walked to the window. There were only distant sporadic peals to be heard now and the lightning was like thin incandescent wires dangling above the hills by the shore.

"I'd better go back," he muttered.

He heard her get up from the sofa, open the door leading to the veranda, and go out; but he did not move. Presently she came in.

"It's time for me to go to bed," she said. "You don't have to go up yet unless you want to—only remember to turn off the lights. Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

He heard her climb the stairs, open her door and close it behind her. Looking out into the night he could imagine her unhooking her damp dress and getting ready for the night. He had already seen all the properties. Now she would be pulling off her stockings and slipping her narrow, high-arched feet into the down-lined slippers. Now she would be holding that film of silk and lace above her white rounded shoulders. And now she would be brushing her hair. He had never seen her hair when it was down. It was long, probably—

down to her waist perhaps? He turned uneasily from the window and threw his cigarette into the fire. He might as well go to bed himself.

He snapped off the lights and felt his way up-stairs to his room, aided by the crack of light beneath Ursula's door. The sound of her moving in there increased the turmoil that still beat within the cavern of his being. Should he pack up and sneak quietly away? He was bewildered by what had occurred down-stairs, astounded at his own lack of control, the force of his emotion. His nerves were still throbbing with it.

He knew now what she must have felt last week, when he had been so startled at the disclosure of her love. And as his mind reverted to that scene by the brookside and he saw again the mist in her eyes, felt once more the clinging pressure of her arms and lips, recalled her passionate abandonment, his resolution tottered.

He took a drink of Scotch, and throwing off his clothes got into bed and lay there listening to the pounding in his temples. Was it that—or was it the thunder coming back again? Storms like that often "circled," and the second outburst was sometimes worse than the first. The air had grown heavy again. The regularity of the downpour outside hypnotized him into a sort of waking slumber in which his thoughts continued to hover upon the woman lying among the lace pillows in the room across the landing.

He was roused by a white glare and a series of heavy rumblings close at hand. The storm had evidently made up its mind to return. He wondered if Ursula were awake and if she would be frightened. The night winked rapidly, singeing his eyeballs and throwing the walls and furniture into staccato relief, while an iron safe tum-

bled out of the clouds, down an interminable series of wooden stairways, into the grove. The light was now almost continuous, as if nature were seeking to intimidate mankind by means of the Morse code. Then the wind burst across the valley with a roar and hurled itself against the farm. The dreadnoughts of the air circled overhead, concentrating their broadsides upon the house.

A blinding flash accompanied by an ear-splitting detonation brought Peter to a sitting posture. The house trembled. They certainly had been struck! Above the tumult he heard what he took for a cry for help. The firmament opened again. Crash! Again that cry. He threw on his dressing-gown and sprang to the landing. The door of the room opposite was wide, and framed in the light that poured from it stood Ursula in her night-gown, her hair streaming over her shoulders, and her face livid with terror.

"Peter!"

Her voice was drowned in another crash that made the landing shudder.

"It's all right, darling," he shouted, as he put both arms around her.

"Pe-ter!"

She clung to him frenziedly as he carried her inside and with the aid of the lightning found the bed and laid her on it.

"It's all right! It's all right!" he assured her, trying to withdraw his arms, but her hands refused to release his neck behind which she had interlocked her fingers.

"Ursula! Let me go!" he cried, half-stifled.

Then the door, caught in the fury of the wind, banged to behind him.

CHAPTER X

It was that unsettled and unsettling season of the year when city-dwellers are ordering moth-balls, putting on the furniture-covers, closing their dwellings, and engaging servants for the summer; when half one's friends have either moved to the country or sailed for Europe, and the other half are endeavoring to conceal the fact that they have not done so; when society is, to use a legal term, *in transitu*. Otherwise the romance at "Folly Farm" might not have passed, as it did, unnoticed.

Ursula had never known such happiness. What had come to her was too big, too overpowering, to admit of either anxiety or remorse. She had attempted to defy nature and, as in most cases, nature had ultimately proved that conditions were stronger than theories. Bessie had never seen her so lovely, her cheeks so colorful, her eyes so lustrous, her whole being so animated. Even to herself, when she now looked in her mirror, she seemed transfigured.

Added to this was a sense of having triumphed over her fate, of knowing that she had tasted life's sweetness to the full. Whatever happened she had had her hour! Nothing could take that from her. And as she no longer worried about herself, neither did she at first worry about Peter. He had tried and she had tried, each had succeeded and each had failed. There it was!

Peter too was happy, yet all Ursula's tenderness, all her joy in his nearness, could not smother a conscience trained to regard any relationship unblessed by a religious ceremony as wrong. The unsuspected depth of

what the Puritan in him felt to be a profane love made him eager to remove the sole shadow upon their companionship. Again and again during the next few days he urged Ursula to marry him, and each time she gently but definitely refused. Pride ruled her heart.

"I inveigled him into this against his better judgment and perhaps his better self," she said to herself. "I can't let him marry me simply to make amends or to make me an honest woman. He really doesn't want to, no matter what he thinks about it."

That she should consistently decline his entreaties to become his wife distressed and baffled him. He neither comprehended that she loved him too unselfishly to allow him to bind himself to her when at some future time he might wish to be free, nor did he realize that what she gave she must give whole-heartedly and generously, oblivious to whatever the future might bring forth and exacting from her lover no vow of constancy or even of return.

The arrival of *The Astarte* interrupted their honeymoon, for with Enid back at "The Mews," and Blair once more at his desk, it would no longer have been possible for Peter to dally at "Folly Farm," even had his presence not been required at the office. Gay had rushed over in her motor to see Ursula for a few minutes, before taking the train for Canada with Jimmy and his father. From her point of view the trip had been "a flop." "But I'm still as good as when I started," she added, "and that's something—on a yachting-trip these days!"

Ursula was painfully conscious of having turned a fiery red.

"I'm sorry, Ursula! I keep forgetting you don't talk like a fishwife the way most of us do.—Anyhow, the

fact of my innocence is encouraging even if my language leaves something to be desired. What will happen to me while I'm leading a primitive existence in Indian-infested forests is a question."

She looked prettier than ever in her tailored outing suit of gabardine.

"Maybe I won't come back at all. Perhaps I'll find a little Indian of my own. I'm sick to death of the civilized life!" she volunteered, throwing Ursula a kiss. "Anyhow, if I send you a salmon be sure not to leave it at the express office. They have a way of going bad if neglected—like some people. That's partly why I'm going to the Restigouche—so Jimmy won't feel that he's not getting enough attention."

"Aren't you interfering with his chances of making the polo team?"

"He's only a sub, you know. Besides, we'll be back long before the end of June. Jimmy's really too light to ride against those English heavyweights. And then, I want to go!—If Jimmy wanted to play, he'd play. Everybody does what he wants to do."

"Perhaps that's why you didn't regard the cruise as more of a success," said Ursula. "You didn't want to go along in the first place."

Gay shook her shingled head.

"No! There was a real scunner on that cruise! You know how rats leave a sinking ship? Well, the Reverend Thrum and old man Pepperill both deserted at Boston. Something happened—I don't know just what! Carter's a roughneck. I don't see how mother stands him——!"

"I've always liked him," answered Ursula. "He may not have much polish, but he's kindly and generous and straightforward. I can forgive almost anything in a person who has those qualities."

"I don't think he's so kindly and generous," retorted Gay, "unless bribing the clergy is being generous. And I wouldn't gamble much on his honesty, either. Anyhow, there was some sort of a mix-up on *The Astarte.* Teeny and Bob Morgan were the only ones left at the finish, except mother and Jimmy and me. Bob said Thrum beat it back to New York as soon as he got that ten thousand out of Carter for his new reredos. There were crossed wires somewhere! But then, who should worry?—good-bye, Ursula. Look out for yourself! You know I care more for you than anybody in the whole wide world except dad—and I'd hate to have to choose between you, at that!"

Over at "The Mews," curiously enough, things seemed to be going exceptionally well. In pursuance of her policy of conciliation, Enid, upon her return, had greeted Charles almost effusively. He, poor devil, thought she had never looked so attractive. The cruise had done her a lot of good, he said. Indeed, at first he even imagined that her feelings toward him had undergone a change and that a new era of conjugal happiness was about to be inaugurated. He had been so lonely that merely to have somebody in the house again was a delight. Enid, acting upon the advice of Susie Godwin's "little man," whom she had consulted almost as soon as *The Astarte* had docked, encouraged his delusion that the matrimonial millennium had arrived. She had cast off Pepperill, whom she regarded as a turncoat and, having laid her case before the Honorable Arthur B. Gantz, had learned to her satisfaction that she was in a position to dictate her own terms to her husband.

Mr. Gantz discarded as absurd all his elder confrère's scruples about divorce detectives. Whom else could you get to testify? he inquired. People who misconducted

themselves did not usually do so in public. The courts recognized that as clearly as anybody else. He gave, moreover, his full professional approbation to the two signers of the blue-backed affidavits in Enid's possession —knew them to be reliable, first-class men. As against their positive testimony it would do Charles no good to attempt "to perjure himself like a gentleman." No, the defendant's goose was cooked. All Enid would have to do would be to serve her papers and she could get her relief. Of course, Paris was the place for her to go. Much as Mr. Gantz wished that he could handle the matter himself, he was constrained to admit that his legal correspondent on the Rue de Liège, M. Hugues Joignot, could turn the trick better than he.

He outlined the French procedure to her in a few words. First the husband had to establish a "*domicile conjugal*" in Paris. M. Joignot, his confrère, would attend to that. As a matter of fact it was purely nominal, and the husband did not actually have to go abroad until it was time to serve the papers. You merely paid the concierge of some apartment-house a few hundred francs to say you lived there. In accordance with the provision of the French Civil Code requiring a preliminary process, the wife had to start proceedings with a "summation" upon the defendant, issued through the sheriff by the Civil Tribunal of First Instance in the Department of the Seine. The action having been thus begun she must then cite her husband "*en conciliation*" before the same judge who had issued the summation, in order to satisfy him that it was useless for the parties to attempt to live together any longer.

"*Le Conciliation*," which was a formal ceremony required in all lawsuits in France since the Revolution, had been inaugurated in an attempt to do away with

lawyers, who in earlier and less enlightened days had been regarded as a predatory class. "*Le Conciliation*" took place secretly in chambers. Only husband and wife were present. The judge inquired of each party whether it were not possible for them to go on living together, and each said "no," after which he asked whether the wife demanded alimony and what disposition was to be made of the children, if any, during the proceedings. These matters having been straightened out, the judge signed an order of "*non-conciliation*," which was duly served upon the defendant, together with a copy of the "*assignation*," or complaint.

This in effect disposed of the case. It was now at issue, and, while in the ordinary course of events it might take six months or even a year to be reached, it could be disposed of by mutual consent at almost any time, the form of the decree having been agreed upon in advance. If you were in a rush and greased the wheels properly you might possibly get through the whole business in a little over three weeks. The judgment became final automatically at the end of two months, but the parties need not remain in France throughout this period. In fact, so long as one did not remarry in France and was willing to take a slight chance, one could treat the decree as absolutely final from the start. Mr. Gantz admitted having had a certain influential and exceedingly wealthy client who had got a divorce in Paris and been remarried in Brussels, all within twenty-three days. However, he suggested that it would be desirable for Enid to reach France and start the ball rolling by the first of July, before the usual summer vacations should interrupt the regular sittings of the Tribunals.

But how, asked Enid, could she feel the slightest confidence that Charles would allow her to divorce him in

Paris? Mr. Gantz assured her that there would not be the slightest difficulty about that. She had, according to the lawyer, a "dead open-and-shut" case. Unless her husband were a lunatic, he certainly would not elect to have her divorce him in the New York courts, which recognized but one ground and where the proceedings would be public. Charles would not want to have his reputation ruined, and any man who forced his wife to wash their family linen in public would stamp himself such a cad that nobody thereafter would speak to him. He would give her a divorce for the sake of the children, if for no other reason. He would not want them to think of him as a—well, to know about the evidence of the detectives. In a word, Enid had a strangle-hold on her husband and could make him do as she liked. Mr. Gantz intended, he said, to prepare the usual complaint in an action for divorce in the New York Supreme Court on "statutory" grounds, merely to use as a bluff—in the event that Charles proved recalcitrant. The papers would never be actually served; they need only be "shown" to the defendant, which would be quite enough —in the opinion of the lawyer—to make him give up his legal ghost—in other words, to consent to let her divorce him where, how, and when she would.

Enid's admiration for Susie Godwin's lawyer increased momentarily. How simple it all was! She wished that she had looked into the matter sooner. However, she was only forty-three. She had plenty of life before her yet. And the social end would undoubtedly be as easy as the legal. Why should she worry about the attitude people might take? "Teeny" Allyn had never had any trouble. She found herself banking a good deal on Teeny in the present juncture, in spite of the fact that she really knew her to be a common little thing. Her

friend's advice seemed just then of the greatest practical value. After all, there was nothing like the wisdom of experience, and Teeny had certainly had that. So much, she said, depended on how things went at the very beginning. If you could only manage so that people didn't even know you had been divorced and remarried until everything was over it was much easier—"You know I'm Mrs. Billy Jones now! Yes, we were married last week. I divorced my husband in May. Do come and see me!" But never force it! Diplomacy! A church wedding was, of course, a great help. And you must be in a position to entertain so well that everybody would be secretly anxious to come to your house. Of course, it was wise to begin quietly, almost as if you were a newcomer from another city, never giving anybody a chance to snub you. The great thing, according to Teeny, was to be perfectly natural about it. If you waltzed right up to people in a public place they would grab your hand and grin out of mere habit. Nobody really cared. All they were afraid of was that they might get in bad with somebody else. You see?

Enid saw, and for the first time experienced a slight fall of enthusiasm. Nevertheless she did not let it affect her determination or prevent her going ahead with her preparations for leaving Charles. These, conducted under Mr. Gantz's personal auspices, included a complete inventory of such furniture at "The Mews" as she intended to claim as hers, since she had no intention, once having left it, of ever returning there again. It belonged to Charles, of course, but if he should fight she would refuse to give up her dower rights. Another lever!—for he loved the place.

"Babs" and Carlo were not yet back from their respective boarding-schools. It would be time enough to tell

them about the divorce after she had secured it and their father had been put officially in the wrong. Besides, she fully intended to insist on their custody, as a matter of principle. It would give her a standing before the world —even if Carter did not want them. Gay she preferred to leave alone. The girl loved her father. Enid was afraid of her, as an underhanded person always is of a straightforward one. Ursula she could handle merely by appealing to her affection. Enid's attitude toward her sister was outwardly that of a contemptuous amiability, which cloaked a curiously jealous animosity. There was no reason, from her point of view, to be jealous of Ursula; yet she was. She had always been jealous of the attention accorded her by distinguished men, while at the same time resenting the fact that Ursula had not seen fit to marry any one of them. To her it seemed to be putting on airs. How did one know whether she really had ever had any offers or not?—at any rate, from anybody worth while?

But the real basis of Enid's jealousy lay in her unconscious realization that Ursula had something which she herself had not—a quality that drew people of all classes to seek her friendship, and hence was of a tangible value. Her own two allies in religion and in law, Thrum and Pepperill, for example, were devoted to Ursula, and, given any encouragement, might easily have changed allegiance. That was another reason for keeping solid with her. Enid would have laughed at the suggestion that her sister was better than she was. Why, she did not even go to church! Nevertheless, she knew that Ursula was different from herself, and hated her for it. Now that she needed Ursula she hated her for that. For the first time she perceived her value as a moral ally—a social asset. It would never do to have her take sides with Charles.

If only she could persuade her to go with her to Paris? Ursula was a good traveller, excellent company, and her presence would divert suspicion, if their friends noticed that she and Charles had crossed on different boats. She sensed danger in letting her know the whole truth, however. Ursula, who was fond of Charles, would not approve of her course, and, if she knew of it, would naturally want to hear what he might have to say. She must give her the impression that she was merely going abroad for a rest. Once they were in Paris she could let the real situation leak out by degrees. The important thing was to bring pressure upon Charles, so as to make him start at once. Having sprung her mine, he must be hustled out of the way as quickly as possible and given no opportunity to get in touch with her sister. So far he had no inkling of what was in her mind. Fate played into her hands in that Charles had not been near Ursula since the night that she had discovered him with a female companion at "The Cave of the Fallen Angels." It had been, he felt, easier to let the situation go by default than to enter into explanations—which might not explain. Women were apt to be over-suspicious in such matters. This, as it happened, had an important bearing upon Ursula's subsequent attitude.

It was after what had seemed to Charles an exceptionally pleasant week-end that on one Monday morning he entered the office of the president of the Calizona Copper Company in response to a message that the latter wished to see him. He found Blair seated behind the big mahogany desk that filled almost half the room, his mail lying untouched before him, smoking a cigar.

"Sit down," remarked Blair shortly, and the expression on his tanned red face was agreeable enough, for, indeed, he felt no enmity toward the unfortunate Charles.

"Thanks," said the latter. "I trust you had a good time over Sunday? Golfing, weren't you? The weather, except for that one thunder-storm, was certainly fine."

"The weather was excellent," answered Blair rather grimly. What an eternal gas-bag the man was! He held out a cigar as Charles sank into the chair opposite. Charles took it. His new resolutions had not included abjuring tobacco. Blair pressed a bell on the desk in front of him.

"Do not allow me to be disturbed," he told his secretary.

"Yes, we had very good weather," ran on Charles, "exceptional for this time of year, I——"

"Let's cut out the weather reports!" interrupted Blair. "I've something more important to say to you. Your wife wants to get a divorce."

Charles stared at him, while the lighted match between his fingers slowly burned black, curled over, and died.

"Get a divorce!" he repeated bewilderedly. "What for?"

"For the usual reason, I guess," replied Blair. "She's tired of it, that's all. I don't blame her. I have volunteered to talk to you in order to save you both embarrassment."

The skin of Charles' usually florid face had turned yellow. He began to perspire profusely. There was a bottle of Poland water in the corner, and mechanically he got up and filled a glass from the spigot. Even so, his natural politeness did not desert him.

"Have some?" he asked, turning to Blair.

"No, thanks, Charlie."

Charles drained the glass. Then he filled and drank another.

"God!" he ejaculated at length, as he wiped his mouth. He looked fixedly at Blair.

"Why are you mixing up in this?"

Blair returned his gaze steadily.

"Because I love Enid and want to marry her," he said.

He picked up a freshly sharpened pencil and tapped with it automatically on the glass top of the desk.

"There's nothing extraordinary about the matter. Enid and you don't get on together. You haven't for ten years or more. She doesn't love you. She does love me. There needn't be any feeling, Charlie. There's no reason why we shouldn't go right on being the best of friends, but two of us might as well be happy instead of the whole three being miserable."

Charles had allowed his cigar to go out. He seemed to be a detached spectator of the scene in which he was taking part, between the massive, white-haired, confident fellow behind the desk that was Carter Blair and the smaller, flaccid, yellow person that was himself.

"How long has this been going on?" he heard himself ask.

The muscles in Blair's jaw contracted.

"I don't like your form of expression. Nothing has been 'going on,' as you term it. I have admired—and respected—your wife as long as I've known her. We have gradually—come to love each other. It's not at all surprising under the circumstances. No one is to blame. It's the sort of thing that happens all the time, Charlie. The thing to do is to straighten it out as good-naturedly as possible."

He struck a match and held it to the stump of his cigar, as if there were nothing more that could be said.

"You've got a nerve!" Charles' lips trembled.

"I'm an interested party. It's my business. If you do as I want I shall be everlastingly grateful. After all, what's a divorce? I should think you'd welcome the chance to be free to do as you like."

"Would you? How about yourself?" It was an unaccountably shrewd thrust for the stupid Charles. Blair did not reply at once. Then he said dryly:

"I'm in love—that's the difference."

"So you ask me to give up my wife in order that you may marry her?" repeated Charles, with equal dryness. "And suppose I refuse?"

"You can't."

"Why not?"

"Because she's got all the evidence she needs to divorce you on the usual statutory grounds."

A finger of ice drew itself slowly down Charles' spinal cord.

"What are you talking about?" he demanded in a hollow tone.

Blair tossed him the two affidavits. Charles perused them, scowling.

"But it's a damn lie! I've had nothing whatever to do with that woman!"

Blair shrugged.

"That's for the jury to decide. I'm advised by my lawyers that the evidence is good and plenty. You naturally can't spend the witching midnight hours in a strange lady's flat without——"

Charles leaned forward, his hands clenched.

"I swear to you, Carter, that Enid hasn't the slightest ground for a divorce. You had Enid off with you on *The Astarte*, and I asked that woman to go to a cabaret because I was lonely. When I took her home she invited me up to her room for a drink, and we sat there a while

talking about Arizona. She used to live in Bisbee. Come to think of it, she said she used to know you!"

"Well, I've known a lot of 'em one time or another!" grunted Blair. "We've both lived in the wild and woolly. Why not face the facts? Enid can get a decree any time she chooses. But she wants to be as decent as possible about it. She's willing to spare you the disgrace and notoriety and all that, provided you don't oppose her. In a word, she's willing to go to Reno or Sonora or Paris and get a decree for incompatibility or anything you may prefer."

"And the children?"

"Of course she must have the children—naturally."

Charles threw himself back in his chair. His face was suffused and there were two horizontal lines of watery beads across his forehead. He felt in his pocket for his handkerchief, which lay beside his hand.

"My God, Carter!" he protested. "You can't do this thing to me!"

The lines about the mouth of the other man softened.

"I can't help it, old chap. It's the fortune of war. I've only the kindest feelings toward you!"

"But she wouldn't do it without you! It's you just as much as she! How can you sit there and talk about friendship when you're proposing to smash my life just for the sake of your own happiness?"

Blair's face hardened again.

"Let's cut out all that! You've got no kick coming. You know as well as anybody that you've been kept on here doing nothing for nearly twenty years at a fat salary, just because you had influential friends. When I came in as president, although I hadn't the slightest obligation to, I did the same thing—largely on account of your wife and children."

Charles had got to his feet, his head lowered, his body swaying.

"And for that reason you think I ought to turn them over to you?"

"I don't feel any need to answer that question," said Blair sternly. "I'm only pointing out to you that there has been every disposition to give you a fair deal. And you can still have your place here so long as you don't render the situation impossible. For heaven's sake, don't let's have any row. After all, your children are practically grown up and you can see them whenever—they want to see you."

"Thanks!" muttered Charles. "That's very kind of you."

"Come! Come!" retorted Blair. "Don't let's have any of that sort of talk! I'm willing to be fair and more than generous! If you're willing to co-operate with Enid in getting a quiet divorce, you can have your choice of remaining with the company at your present salary or of resigning with a hundred thousand dollars cash. Otherwise you'll go with nothing—for the good of the service. I'll stand all legal expenses, of course. Naturally you'll want to consult an attorney. You can take along these papers and show them to him if you like. We want everything strictly aboveboard."

Charles crammed the affidavits into his pocket.

"Meantime everything stands as it is," continued Blair briskly. "Enid will know I've spoken to you, but nobody else need do so. My idea is that you should go right on with your regular family life, keep the whole thing a dead secret until it's all over—from everybody, including your children."

Charles regarded him fixedly. The muscles of his neck were like straining hawsers.

"How soon have I got to give you my answer?"

"To-morrow morning. I suppose you've got to have time to consult a lawyer to convince yourself we're not bluffing. Don't take it so hard, old man!"

Charles arose unsteadily. Slowly he felt his way to the door of the president's office. On the threshold he turned.

"You can have my answer right now!" he said. "Go to hell—and be damned to you!"

As Enid had anticipated, Charles precipitated the matter that very evening after the children had gone to bed. She had been nerving herself for the coming interview all day, but even so she could hardly recognize her husband in the grim and ashen man who invited her to the den. She had never liked the den, with its rows of grinning trophies, and to-night their glassy eyes and gleaming tusks made her shudder. Charles motioned her to a chair.

"Blair has told me what you propose to do," he said, and waited for her to speak, but she merely raised her eyebrows.

"I suppose I've been an idiot not to see how things were going," he went on. "However— we can discuss that later—about you and Blair, I mean. What I want to talk about is you and me."

He looked at her steadfastly.

"Enid, I know you don't love me any more. As for me—my feelings will be determined more or less by what you see fit to do after you hear what I have to say. But you have no reason to doubt my word. I never lied to you once in all our married life, and I'm not going to lie to you now."

He was going to make another of his interminable speeches, thought Enid. There was a box of cigarettes

on the tabouret by her side, and she took one and lit it —gracefully.

"Well?" she said indifferently.

"You propose to divorce me—and square your conscience for marrying Carter afterward—on the ground that I've been unfaithful to you. He's shown me what he calls the proof. I have it here." He slapped his pocket. "The charge is absolutely false. I've not been unfaithful to you with that woman or any other. I don't know anything about the rules of evidence. They don't cut any figure. The point is that you have no basis for what you propose doing.

"I've always thought you were an honest woman, Enid, and that you wouldn't do anything unfair or dishonest. I give you the credit for being influenced in this by some one else. Well—I have not been unfaithful to you. I might have been, perhaps. But I was not. I swear it. I will give you my oath as your husband, as the father of our children, on the altar of Almighty God, that the charge is without the slightest foundation."

She knew he was speaking the truth, and her courage almost failed her.

"Is that all?" she asked calmly.

"Isn't that enough? You know I wouldn't lie to you."

"I know nothing about it. I don't know whether you've ever lied to me or not. I have only the evidence to go on. I certainly don't expect to go on living with a man who admits associating with bad women—and who goes to their rooms at night. Such a man is not fit to have the custody of a young boy and girl."

Charles gave a rude laugh.

"I suppose Carter Blair is?"

"Carter Blair has nothing to do with this case."

Again Charles laughed.

"Hasn't he? He offered me a hundred thousand dollars to let you divorce me, and threatened to throw me out of the company if I didn't! If that isn't collusion, nothing is. It may even constitute blackmail. My lawyer assures me it would put the kibosh on your ever getting a divorce."

"I tell you again you can leave Carter Blair out of it," answered Enid. "I am going to get the divorce, not he. I do not know whether I shall ever marry him or not. What he does or offers to do is no concern of mine!"

She emphasized her remark by screwing her cigarette into the tray.

"It's no use, Charles; you can't frighten me!"

'I'm not trying to frighten you, Enid. I'm only trying to appeal to your sense of fairness—of decency. I'm beginning to feel as if I never knew you!"

She tapped impatiently upon the floor with her foot. As long as that was all he was going to do she knew that she had the upper hand.

"Have you quite finished? I would like to go to bed."

Charles sighed. It was clear to him that he had never known this woman with whom he had lived now for nearly twenty years; and he realized in advance the hopelessness of any sort of appeal.

"Enid," he said, "if you insist on going ahead with this thing in spite of what I've told you, have you considered the effect upon our children? I may not be a great success as a father, but I'm better than none. They love me. They have a right to me, such as I am. And I have a right to them. This business of belonging half to one parent and half to another, particularly if the parents have married again, is all wrong.

"The poor kids don't belong anywhere. They're shifted around from pillar to post to meet sudden changes of

plan. The only home they know belongs to a stranger. Take Babs, for instance. If you divorced me and married some one—any one—else, particularly if that person had a family of his own, what sort of life would she have? I'd have no money to run a house. She'd have to live with me at some sort of a hotel. When she was with you she'd be living in a stranger's house—somebody with another name.

"For God's sake, Enid, listen to me! It may be our last talk together. This is my home. I bought this land thirty years ago, and gradually, little by little, built the house and the stables. All my life has centred around it. My friends were welcome here—and glad, I think, to come! It represents my career—the only career I'll ever have! I lived here when I fell in love with you. Do you remember that first house-party you came on? And then that night you let me kiss you down on the point—in the moonlight?

"We were awfully happy! The children were born here. They all grew up here. They learned to ride and drive right on the place. They had their friends here to play with them. When they went away on visits they had a home to come back to. So did I. Everybody knows I'm a 'dud' as a financier. I've always hated sitting at a desk. But I'm not a bad host. People like to come here. We're lined up on the decent, respectable side of things. Our children are good children. The house is a good house.

"Don't let it all go to smash, Enid! For the children's sake, if for nothing else, let's keep our home together, no matter what else we do. You don't have to break it all up, even if you believe that I've been unfaithful to you. I haven't—but suppose I had been? You want nothing of me. I ask nothing of you. If you care for Blair, I've

no objection to your having him here all you want—being anything to him you like. The main thing is to keep the home together for the children's sake. Nothing else matters! We're middle-aged people, Enid. Don't let's disgrace the family name by washing a lot of imaginary dirty linen in court."

His head had sunk between his shoulders, as it had done in Blair's office; he lowered at her, his jaw set, his fists tight. Enid stood up, her eyes blue points of steel.

"Do you suggest that I should become another man's mistress?"

"I think it would be better for you to live your own life with my consent than to break up my home and disgrace our family against my will. You don't have to do either. I merely say that if you insist on one or the other, the former is preferable."

Enid turned her back upon him and walked toward the threshold.

"If nothing else had happened," she remarked frigidly, "the suggestion you have just made would justify my leaving you."

A curious and terrible sound came from where Charles was standing.

"Enid!—Please!—Have mercy!—For God's sake! Don't do this!"

But without looking back she passed through the door and went up-stairs.

CHAPTER XI

It was a new Peter who tore himself away from "Folly Farm" to resume his responsibilities at the Calizona. In place of the taciturn, methodical executive there was an impulsive, emotional fellow, unfamiliar to his associates. A transmutation had occurred in the chemistry of his nature, by which his passion for Ursula had broken down and dissolved the crystals of his Puritan self-consciousness. Formerly he had been controlled, impersonal, giving an impression of indifference, even of hardness; now he found himself sensitive to all sorts of new appeals. He had been brought up in that New England school where evidence of emotion is regarded as weakness. The active contacts of his professional life had somewhat corrected this, but until he had met Ursula he still suffered from congenital unresponsiveness. That was all changed now. He had, without his knowing it, acquired a temperament, and this manifested itself in such an extreme disinclination to give up her society that Ursula was worried. It had not occurred to her that his love might interfere with his work, that he might become so obsessed with her that he could think of nothing else; yet it became increasingly obvious that this was the case.

As time went on, her growing dependence upon his companionship frightened her a little. She began to distrust her own powers of renunciation. Unless they married, there were many reasons why such a relationship as theirs might eventually prove a detriment to him—the chief of which was that he might sometime wish to wed

a younger woman. It was true that Peter was always asking her to marry him and clearly adored her, but the fact remained that she was seven years his senior. Romance and marriage were two entirely different things. While the depth of a romance which dared not take the risk of marriage might *au fond* be open to question, there was no such question between her and Peter. Her only fear was that she might ultimately prove a drag upon him. She must not take the chance of becoming a millstone about his neck! When he had attained her present age, she would be nearing fifty. He was just at the beginning of the grade; she was at the top and—for a woman, at any rate—starting down. The affair had been of her choosing, not his. He had not wanted it in the first place. She had, so to speak, vamped him. Now that he was hers she ought not to take advantage of her temporary power to drag him into matrimony, even if he thought he wanted it. It might easily be that in time he would revert to his vision of youthful love.

Suppose that they should go on living together, and that some day she should find that she had neither the courage nor the strength to refuse to become his wife? Had she not once already deliberately overstepped the bounds that she had placed upon their relationship? Was it not entirely her fault that things were as they were? Might she not easily do the same thing again? It was too great a risk. She must part from him in such a way that he could really find out where he stood and what his actual feelings were. She would not make any blind, heroic gesture. But she would break with him so definitely that it would act as an absolute release so far as he was concerned. After a sufficient separation, both in time and distance, to serve as an adequate test, she might—if he still wished it—marry him. But it must be

a real test—not a perfunctory one. To postpone their parting much longer would make such a test impossible.

In her exalted state of mind Ursula was honestly fearful that, just as she had once betrayed Peter from friendship into love, so she might now betray him from love into marriage. But how could she explain this to Peter without so wounding him that it would be worse than if their present relationship were to continue? She must not let him know that he was being tested. She tried rather feebly to loosen the bonds that held him to her. At first they had been together daily, either at "Folly Farm" or in the city; now she sought pretexts for breaking the continuity of their companionship, resolving that for his sake it must end, at least for the present.

The monstrous cruelty of Enid's determination to go ahead with proceedings which she knew to be based on falsehood, showed Charles that he could expect no quarter from her. She would be absolutely relentless. He saw now the whole scheme of elaborate duplicity by which she and Blair had made a fool of him! No wonder he was not a success at business or anything else! He was just a "dud," a dunderhead—too stupid to be deserving of sympathy. For an instant he entertained a furtive thought of trying to induce Ursula to make one last plea to Enid for mercy, but he dismissed the idea. He could not contemplate the possibility either of disrupting the relationship of two sisters or of disclosing to Ursula the depravity of one she loved. She must find it out for herself. Besides, she might even side with Enid. She had seen enough, perhaps, to lead her to believe all. No, he would drink his cup alone. He would never return to the Calizona while Blair was connected with it, nor to "The Mews" while Enid was there.

The night he had made his appeal to her and she had refused to listen to him, he had packed his bag and gone to an hotel. Sitting there alone in the cheerless bedroom, listening to the roar from the street below and the constant click of elevator doors from the corridor outside, he realized that from now on this, or a room like it, would be the only home that he would have. Deprived of his salary he could no longer maintain "The Mews," even if he had anybody to keep it up for. His life had been ended by a single foul blow from a woman whom he had loved and trusted. There was nothing left. He would be lucky if he could find a job as clerk in a brokerage office. But he wouldn't go down without a fight! Let her prove her case if she could! If she wanted to drag the family reputation in the mire it was her responsibility, not his. He had done nothing wrong. He would defy her as he had Blair.

But the shock of discovering Enid's baseness had left him weak. She loomed before him now, terrible, malignant, implacable. By dawn there was no fight left in him. He knew that he was beaten. The children must be protected. He could never bring himself to defend an action in the Supreme Court based on an alleged act of adultery, even if the evidence against him were deliberately perjured. Whatever Enid might be willing to do, he could never subject Gay and Babs and Carlo to any such ordeal. Their good name must be preserved at whatever cost to himself.

Radway, the lawyer whom he consulted, told him, moreover, that it was a hopeless case to defend. The evidence of the detectives might be false, but plenty of disinterested people had seen him in the woman's company—including his own sister-in-law. Even if he won a verdict—which was not likely—everybody would take it

for granted that he was guilty. The lawyer could not entirely conceal the fact that he, himself, would probably share the general opinion. It would hardly be assumed that Charles Kent, the well-known sporting man, had gone to a woman's bedroom in a cheap hotel to say his prayers.

"It's tough luck, Charlie!" the lawyer, who happened also to be a friend of many years' standing, had said. "But we have got to look at the situation from a practical point of view. On the legal side you haven't a chance —your wife would win in a walk. Of course, nobody cares one way or the other what you may have been up to—any more than I do. But they are going to accept the jury's interpretation of the facts, and blame you severely for forcing your wife to go into open court to get her decree when you could have helped her get one quietly. Everybody will take her side—including your children—particularly when their aunt has been called as a witness against you, as she will be. She'll give the plaintiff's testimony the necessary air of respectability even if, as you say, it's made out of whole cloth. Her evidence may not be vitally important, but it will cinch the case against you."

He spoke as one having authority.

"There's another aspect of the matter you ought to consider very seriously. You've got three particularly attractive children. As the years go on you'll want to see as much of them as you can, and what they think of you is going to matter a lot. Now, even if they take an easy-going attitude about your general conduct, the chances are that if you precipitate a nasty scandal by fighting the case they'll never forgive you. The children feel that sort of disgrace very keenly. I know it's hard, old man. You want vindication. I don't suppose I can

blame you. But putting that aside—you won't get it!—You have nothing to gain and everything to lose by taking this mess to court. If you're wise you'll let me tell Gantz that so long as your wife makes no charges of infidelity against you, you will co-operate with her in getting her decree in Paris. In that way, while you'll lose your wife—and she's gone already!—you'll save your children. Doesn't that sound like sense?"

Charles was forced to admit that it did. His children's love was the most precious thing left to him in the world. He could not afford to jeopardize it. If he did as Enid wanted, instead of thinking of him as a cad they would naturally suppose that she had got the divorce simply in order to marry Blair—which was the truth—and would despise her for it. He would win in the end.

Five days after the interview in Blair's office Charles sailed for France to acquire the necessary domicile in Paris, without having seen either his wife or Ursula again. The more he considered the matter, the more unfortunate his encounter with his sister-in-law at the Cave of the Fallen Angels seemed to him. It was even possible that her seeing him there had precipitated the whole miserable business.

Having thus successfully got rid of Charles, Enid's next step was to take Ursula into camp. She did not wish to go to Paris alone, and Gay was not only unavailable at the moment, but there was no way of knowing what her attitude would be, if she were. Enid was wise enough to see that by divorcing Charles to marry Blair she would probably lose the children, but she did not care. She knew in her heart that the charge on which her action was based was unfounded, and she thus naturally distrusted the effect of the evidence upon the minds of a jury, even with Mr. Gantz's assurances that it was

"copper-riveted," particularly as she was unaware that Ursula had anything to tell which might serve as corroboration. Had not Gantz said that the contemplated action in the New York Supreme Court was only "a bluff"? It was better to make sure of her decree in Paris, even at the cost of her children's respect, than to take any chances. She knew what she wanted, and that was to become Mrs. Carter Blair at the earliest possible moment. Gay would probably go with her father, anyhow. Ursula was her best bet. Having carefully rehearsed the scene in which she should first break the ground, she ordered her car and drove to "Folly Farm" the same day that Charles sailed.

Ursula, in pursuance of her tapering-off policy, had avoided seeing Peter for three days, and she was utterly miserable in consequence. Twenty times during the seventy-two hours she had started for the telephone, and on each occasion it had required all her resolution to refrain from calling him up. It was terrible to be so dependent upon another person! She sought to divert her thoughts from Peter by devoting herself to her garden, which up to the time of his advent had been her chief interest. Enid from the motor could see her working there in her wide-brimmed straw hat.

"Hello!" she called, getting out and advancing as far as the hedge. "Why haven't you been over to see me?"

Ursula waved her trowel.

"Be with you in a second! I've just one more bulb."

"I'll wait for you in the arbor," said Enid, but Ursula overtook her before she reached it and gave her a welcoming kiss.

"So glad you're back! I'd have been over but I had so much planting——!"

The arbor was away from the house, and therefore a

good place to talk if one did not wish to be overheard. Outside the air was hot and alive with the drone of bees. There was no one about but Jim Curry and he was at the farther end of the orchard.

"Broiling, isn't it!" exclaimed Enid, laying her gloves upon the table. "I don't see how you stand it out there in the sun!"

It annoyed her that Ursula could look so fresh and blooming. It struck her somehow as being almost indecent in a woman of her age. She wondered if she had not made a mistake, herself, in giving up outdoor exercise in favor of bridge and mah jong. She consoled herself, however, with the reflection that while sunburn might not be unbecoming to Ursula, it would be devastating to a delicate complexion like her own.

"Well, my dear!" said Ursula. "Tell me about the cruise? How was it?"

"Oh, all right! Carter always does things up to the hilt, of course." Enid brushed the cruise aside. "I should have enjoyed it more if it had not been for what I found out when I returned!"

Ursula felt herself turn white—then red. But quick-witted as Enid ordinarily was, her present self-consciousness led her to attribute this change of color to the possibility of her sister's having heard something about herself and Blair. What a prude Ursula was! She must learn to be more of a woman of the world. Paris would do her good! But if Ursula had heard anything, the quicker she put Charles in the wrong the better.

"Ursula," she began, "don't be too much distressed at what I am going to tell you, but the fact is that Charles and I have not been getting on well for some time now, and things have reached such a pass that I can't stand it any longer. I might have been able to put

up with his drinking, but his going around publicly with women is too much. I can't live in the same house with him while he is carrying on that way. No one could expect it of me, could they?"

Ursula raised her eyes quickly to her sister's. The blood that had flooded her cheeks at the possibility of Enid's having learned of her friendship with Peter slowly resumed its customary channels as she hastily sought to readjust her mind to this new situation. She had always assumed her sister's marriage to be a happy and successful one, and the scene between Enid and Charles at "The Mews" the night she had met Peter there had been her first inkling that it was not. Since then she had been entirely occupied with her own affairs.

"Poor Enid!" she said. "I'm so sorry! I had no idea there was anything serious between you and Charles. Of course, I realized the night I dined with you on my birthday that everything was not quite right. In fact, Charles confided some of his troubles to me, and I tried to get him to go to you and patch things up."

"What did he confide to you?" demanded Enid quickly, on the alert.

"In substance, that you treated him coldly."

Enid gave a short laugh.

"How could I treat him otherwise!"

To Ursula, in view of what she personally knew of Charles' conduct during his wife's absence, her sister's rejoinder seemed reasonable enough. If one's husband preferred other women, what could one do? Certainly Enid could not hold herself ready to receive his embraces merely to suit his whim and convenience! That would be utterly degrading! It was even rather noble of Enid to stick to him. No wonder she was upset; quite natural that—certainly with all the children away—she

should not want to remain alone in the house with him.

"Why don't you come over and stay here with me for a while?" she asked.

Enid shook her head wearily.

"I must have an entire change of scene—try to forget it. Do you blame me for not wishing to go on?"

"I certainly do not, if what you say is true," agreed Ursula. "Is there any particular woman?"

Enid bent her head.

"Yes, for a long time evidently—some one he knew out in Arizona. He has been very surreptitious about it. I never suspected."

Ursula took her sister's hand. It did not occur to her to ask how Enid had found out.

"I wish there were something I could do to help straighten things out!"

"There is," replied Enid, looking up. "I have taken passage next Saturday for France. I'm going over to Paris for a few weeks to clarify my mind. I want you to come with me. Say that you will!"

For Ursula it was a way out. Here, ready to her hand, was the opportunity for leaving Peter, which she had sought. She did not even have to invent an excuse. It might be fairly said that duty called her. Yet it was one thing to decide that she ought to leave him—quite another to act upon her resolution! Could she bring herself to part from him even temporarily? He would undoubtedly be hurt at her defection. Still, the break would have to be made some time, and such a chance would not occur again. Once they were separated she could make him see that it was the best thing that could have happened. Moreover, Enid would be a great comfort to her. It would be much easier to go abroad

with her than to cross the ocean alone. She could stay in Paris a month or two and see how Peter managed to get along without her. Their present relationship should be definitely severed. If she ever returned to him it should be as his wife.

Enid saw her mind working, but without suspicion. It was not to be expected that Ursula could rush right off with her at a moment's notice without having to make some social readjustments.

"We should be back in plenty of time for the Prince's visit," she urged. "Naturally I want to see the international polo matches as much as you do."

"How about the children?"

"Oh, they'll get along," replied Enid confidently. "Gay will look after them. Besides, they've got plans of their own. They don't pay any attention to me. Why should I to them!"

"I suppose they will be all right," answered Ursula, reflecting that Charles had always been a model father, even if he were no longer a model husband. "I had been thinking something, myself, of going abroad for a few weeks this summer, a little later on, but if you have made your plans to go this Saturday I—why"—she forced the words out with an effort—"I'll try to get ready in time to go with you."

Enid leaned forward.

"That's a dear!" she cried. "You can't imagine how much it will mean to me to have you with me. I haven't mentioned the fact of my going to anybody, and it might be as well if you didn't. I'm delighted! Now I must get back to my packing."

She kissed Ursula affectionately. It would have been hard to realize that this was the same Enid who had planned the surprise of the forty-candled cake upon her sister's birthday.

Had not Ursula's *locus penitentiæ* been so short, and had it not coincided with a business trip which took Peter for a few days to Chicago, her resolution might have failed. But having made her decision, she did not retract, and when he returned, eager to see her again, the *Paris* had sailed. Ursula's letter, sent back by the pilot and handed to him by the hotel clerk at the Croyon with his other mail, was his first intimation that she had had any intention of going abroad, and at first he could not credit her words. Mechanically he read them over and over, as incredulity turned to realization. No, there was no doubt about it. She had gone. And this was her good-bye, her last farewell—this neat eight-page epistle containing her analysis of the situation! What did it matter to him that she did not belittle the happiness their friendship had given her or the pain she had undergone at reaching her final conclusion?—it was the conclusion that staggered and crushed him! How could she have penned those cruel conventional sentences! "Always the best of friends"!—"You have your career to make"!—"Try to forget"!—"New interests and new friends"!—"Spare us both the agony of parting"!

So that was all he meant to her! Was that the way to treat a friend with whom you had been on terms of such intimacy? It was perfectly plain. She was tired of him and this was the easiest way out of it. No, she could not have tired of him since the last time he had seen her! That was inconceivable. What was it, then? What fool idea had suddenly struck her? His career? What nonsense! How could their friendship hurt his career? The whole thing was too absurd, too futile, too womanlike! How could she have done this thing to him! She must be crazy, the victim of a sudden irrational impulse. Did she for an instant imagine that he would not follow and bring her back? Of course that was what she expected

him to do! She wanted to find out just what his boasted affection amounted to! Well, she should see. He would be in Paris almost as soon as she was—the *Mauretania* was sailing on Wednesday—and, unless something catastrophic prevented, Ursula should come back Mrs. Peter McKay.

CHAPTER XII

Her trip across the Atlantic and her actual separation from Peter intensified Ursula's conviction that she had done the only right thing. It had been a terrible wrench for her, yet she told herself that time would dull her heartache, as it had in the case of so many other women. She must build a new life for herself, just as she had advised Peter to do. She had many friends in Paris, Rome, and London, and she would try to renew some of her old friendships. Besides, Enid needed her, for her sister was in a highly nervous condition, fluctuating between periods of despondency and of almost hysterical gaiety.

An ocean voyage was always exhilarating to Ursula, and for a brief interval the new faces and unusual surroundings tended to distract her mind from her own difficulties, but once the excitement of the arrival at Havre was over and she and Enid had said their good-byes and settled back in their compartment upon the express, the finality of the step which she had taken was hammered into her consciousness by every vagary of the fleeting French landscape. As she drove from the Gare St. Lazare along the crowded boulevards in the soft chrome of the early Paris evening, breathing once again the subtle perfume of the languorous city, she felt a pang at the thought of the difference Peter's presence would have made to her. What a holiday they could have had there together! What a pleasure it would have been to show him the treasures of art and history that she knew so well, to drive out for tea to the Pré Catalan or the Cordon Bleu, to dine alone with him at the "Tour d'Argent," at Foyot's, or "l'Escargot," watching the rows of lamps that

marked bridge after bridge across the dark, mysterious flood which wound its way through the gayest, saddest, wisest, most romantic, yet most practical city in the world!

Enid had favored going to the Ritz, but, as Ursula in her present mood preferred a quieter hotel, they compromised upon the Mirabeau on the Rue de la Paix, equally convenient to the shopping district, which was what Enid wanted, and where they were able to secure a large, if noisy, suite. They were on the way to their bankers the morning after their arrival when Ursula fancied that she saw Charles upon the other side of the street. She realized, of course, almost instantly that it could not be her brother-in-law, who must at that moment, as she supposed, be at least three thousand miles away, and the man in question did look rather older and less elegant, but the resemblance was sufficiently close to lead her to wonder whether Enid had observed it.

"Did you notice that man across the way? He looked so much like Charles!" she said to Enid, although he had already vanished in the crowd.

"Charles? No, I didn't notice anybody that looked like him," replied Enid slowly, perceiving that she could not postpone the moment of her full disclosure to Ursula much longer, while dreading the anticipation of it and the complexity of falsehoods it would entail if she were to retain her sister's allegiance.

"It was really an astonishing resemblance," commented Ursula, "although the man looked a good deal older, I think."

"I've seen a lot of men who looked like him. He's not very distinguished in his appearance," remarked Enid, trying not to say anything which Ursula could later stigmatize as an attempt to deceive.

"Charles isn't exactly handsome," answered Ursula. "But as men go I think he's quite good-looking," she added loyally.

"I'm glad somebody thinks so!"—Enid diverted the conversation to a jeweller's window.—"What a wonderful *vallière!*" But Nemesis was already stalking her, for the mail clerk at Morgan, Harjes & Company on hearing her name remarked politely in Ursula's presence that Monsieur Kent had just been in upon the same errand.

"Then it *was* Charles that I saw!" exclaimed Ursula. "But I don't understand! Is Charles over here?—Enid! What does this mean?"

Enid flushed.

"Ssh!" she whispered, laying her hand on Ursula's wrist. "Yes, he is in Paris. Come back to the hotel and I will tell you all about it. Not here, though! There are too many people."

In spite of the flutter of excitement that Enid's admission caused her, it did not prevent Ursula from looking anxiously through the mail. There was no letter from Peter in it!

"Yes, Charles is here," said Enid, lighting a cigarette and throwing herself at full length on the *chaise longue* by the fireplace, where she would not have to look Ursula in the face. "It is a most unhappy story, Ursula, my dear, and I have tried to spare you the knowledge of it as long as I could. But I see it's no longer possible. You will have to know everything sooner or later, and it might as well be now as then. Only in that way can you be of any real help to me.—Charles and I are thinking of getting a divorce!"

"A divorce? You and Charles! Oh, Enid! You can't be!" exclaimed Ursula in distress. She dropped her let-

ters upon the table and came over to where her sister was lying. Enid, congratulating herself that her introduction had precipitated no recriminations, stretched out her hand and touched Ursula's.

"There's nothing left for me! I couldn't bear to tell you before, because I knew how fond you were of Charles and how it would upset you! He has been behaving dreadfully—so badly, in fact, that some time ago my lawyers advised my bringing divorce proceedings. It is his suggestion that we should come here. He wishes to avoid the disgrace of being made a defendant in New York."

The thought of Enid's divorcing Charles had never entered Ursula's head. She had implicit confidence in her sister's veracity, and it did not occur to her at the moment that Enid had made use of any false representations to induce her to accompany her. She was only concerned with the effect that Enid's proposed action would have upon the future of the family.

"But Enid! Must you divorce Charles? I should think for the sake of the children——"

"It is for their sake that I am divorcing him. I can't have him flaunting his mistresses in their faces!—And he is quite ready to give the children up. He realizes the impossibility of the situation!"

"If you can't live together why don't you merely have a separation. Sometime perhaps——"

Enid buried her face in the cushion of the *chaise longue*.

"Never!—It's all over. My love for him is absolutely dead!—When you consider the hypocrisy of his having come to me the night before I left on *The Astarte*, and told me that he loved me, and then no sooner had I sailed—to go off with that woman!—It's too disgusting!"

Ursula walked to the window and looked across the steep, sun-drenched roofs—gray, with here and there a pinkish slate, like the pinkish tinge on the breasts of the gray pigeons that strutted along them. From below rose the clatter and honk of the Rue de la Paix. How curious that she should have come to Paris to end her relationship with Peter, to find that her sister had been brought there upon the same sort of errand! She accepted without question Enid's assertion that Charles had admitted his guilt, as well as her statement that he had asked her to divorce him in Paris rather than in New York. But, although she was not a churchwoman, she was opposed to divorce on general principles, and in particular to the remarriage of divorced persons. To her there was something shocking in the idea of a woman who had given herself to one man, ever living with another. It was true that in a sense she was divorcing herself from Peter, but that was only because she loved him, and for his sake, and she would never marry any one else. She wondered what she would have done if Peter had been unfaithful to her. She would have left him, of course! Was Enid really doing anything more than that? If she had only known it sooner she might have helped somehow. But now it was too late! She did not realize how skilful Enid's manœuvring had been! What she had heard grieved and shocked her, but her own unhappiness made her all the more ready to share that of her sister.

"You must not desert me!" came in a sob from the *chaise longue*. Poor Enid!

Ursula turned away from the window, the tears dimming her sight.

"Dear Enid!" she said, dropping upon her knees beside her. "Of course I won't desert you. I will do every-

thing I can to make it easy for you—But," she added in a lower tone, "of course I can't help but be a little sorry for Charles, too!"

"When you know the evidence I don't think you'll disturb yourself over Charles' state of mind!" said Enid, sitting up and beginning to arrange her hair. "I must go and see the lawyer to-morrow morning. Will you come with me?—Mr. Gantz made an appointment by cable before we sailed."

"Who is Mr. Gantz?" Enid's practicality gave Ursula a slight turn.

"A specialist—recommended by Mr. Pepperill," answered Enid, justifying herself by the recollection of the old lawyer's satirical remark that Mr. Gantz was undoubtedly an ornament to the profession and as honest as he was able. "He handles most of the divorces for the people we know. By the way, Teeny Allyn is over at the Ritz. I think I'll run over there before lunch."

She put on her hat.

"Of course, Charles is quite capable of being nasty, even if—in a sense—I'm doing him a favor by coming over here. He naturally resents being put in the wrong. If he should learn that you were in Paris and comes to the hotel, I would not see him, if I were you. He would merely tell you a lot of lies and try to get you on his side."

"I hardly think he will try to do that!" said Ursula. "He would find an interview under the circumstances just as painful as I should. Who is your lawyer in Paris?"

Enid opened her bag and took out a letter, which she unfolded.

"'M. Hugues Joignot,'" she read, holding it to the light. "'Cent-cinquante bis Rue de Liège.' If I should

not be back for lunch don't wait for me. But don't forget to keep to-morrow morning open. I'll see you at dinner, anyway."

No. 150 bis Rue de Liège, from which M. Hugues Joignot, the *avocat* recommended by Mr. Gantz, had written to Enid, signing himself "*avec l'expression de mes sentiments les plus distingués*," proved, to Ursula's surprise, to be a dingy apartment-house in one of the less fashionable residential quarters of Paris. Not being familiar with French customs, she had assumed that a prominent member of the French bar would have his offices in an imposing building in the heart of the city. Instead, the smelly taxi had carried them for miles through interminable narrow streets, across avenues and squares of which she had never heard, to stop finally before a hideous modern structure of yellow brick with rococo stone trimmings, sandwiched between a *corsetière* and a *lingère*.

Mr. Pepperill's office was in a magnificent Wall Street building, within a stone's throw of the Stock Exchange; where, after the express elevator emptied you out at the floor occupied by his celebrated firm, you were approached by a silver-haired servitor resembling a Canon of Westminster, who inquired your business, soothed your apprehensions, invited you to be seated, and eventually ushered you into the august presence itself. Here there was not even an elevator. A winding stone staircase supported by cupids, the evidences of whose puberty were concealed by garlands of assorted fruits, led upward into a dim smell of cabbage. For Ursula divorce and cabbage were thereafter always inevitably associated. This association became more and more apparent as she approached the floor upon which M. Joignot dwelt,

and particularly when, after several soundings of a gong-like bell, his door was opened by a swarthy peasant woman with a barrel-like figure swathed in blue calico. Behind her Ursula could look through a pair of red velvet portières into what at first appeared to be an auction-room of second-hand *objets d'art*, and from which came the sound of some one slowly picking at the keys of a typewriter. The peasant woman stared at them dumbly, and then, as the object of their visit slowly penetrated her mind, led the way into the auction-room.

"M. Joignot?—Oui, mesdames! Placez vous, mesdames."

She indicated two gold chairs, such as are commonly supplied by caterers, and disappeared through another pair of portières, these of purple bound with gold fringe. A saturnine woman of middle age, dressed severely in serge and wearing paper cuffs, sat at the other end of the room in front of a miniature typewriter. She gave no sign as they entered, except to stop her picking and fix them with a pair of crow-like eyes which she never once shifted. There she sat, motionlessly regarding them, her hands folded on the desk in front of her, without the slightest expression upon her face.

The room had been furnished with the obvious intention of impressing the clients of M. Joignot with the fact that he was a man of taste as well as of law. The fireplace, which was closed by a japanned "register," supported a marble mantel, covered by a pink lambrequin adorned with painted roses, on which stood a small statue of Cupid and Psyche, a bronze bust of Napoleon III, and a frame of gilded bamboo containing a crayon portrait of a gentleman afterward ascertained to be M. Joignot himself.

Several large water-colors of morning-glories and other

flora, framed in gilt oatmeal or some kindred substance, hung on each wall and, wherever the construction of the room rendered it possible, there was a portière slightly different from its fellows in tone. The only window, which looked into an inner court, sported a pair of cerise curtains.

The smell of cabbage was imminent, and the sound of dishes through a partition suggested inevitably that before long M. Joignot *et sa famille*, including possibly the thin lady with the bird's eyes, would sit down to *déjeuner*. A child squealed behind the partition, a female voice rose in vituperation, pans clattered, while the basilisk at the typewriter did her best to turn them to stone. Ursula began to feel very uncomfortable.

M. Joignot was at last discovered in an adjoining chamber of similar size and decoration, in which the odor of cabbage was somewhat diluted by cigarette fumes. Although he apologized profusely for the delay, explaining that he was busy with many important matters, Ursula suspected that he had kept them waiting on purpose, meanwhile occupying himself with reading *Le Rire*, which protruded from beneath a heap of dusty documents.

The whole outfit, including M. Joignot, resembled that of a quack doctor in a Middle Western American town, an impression heightened by his badly fitting frock-coat, his soft, square-toed shoes, baggy trousers, and silk waistcoat strung with a heavy gold-plated watch-chain. He was large, awkward, and abdominal, with white, pudgy face and hands and closely cropped head; his soft black eyes were liquid and shifty; his shoulders exhibited a light fall of snow, and one suspected that had he worn a beard he might have dispensed with a collar. He exuded a piquant odor of "*Suivez moi jeune homme.*" In age he was anything from thirty-five to forty.

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M. Joignot helped them to be seated and ostentatiously closed the door leading into the adjoining chamber which confined the picking woman. These divorce matters were delicate, he explained with suave volubility, and had to be handled *avec la delicatesse.* Fortunately, he had the strongest sort of connections—"ze pull," as one said in America. His eagerness to give the impression of knowing a great deal about the United States, and about everything, made him seem to Ursula like a boy trying to appear grown up. He rambled on at considerable length, assuring them among other things that he had "a good friend" among the judges, who would help him. They must, he declared, rely upon him implicitly. *Mais oui!* He had attended to so many of these little affairs! There was Madame Smeeth, of Texar —which Ursula interpreted to mean Texas—and Madame Snitkin—and Madame Hennessee—and Madame Jackson—with all of whom he had been most successful. But they must proceed *doucement.* Everything must be *doucement.* M. Joignot illustrated with a fat white digit on his red, cupid-like lips. The gesture transformed him from M. Joignot *l'avocat* into M. Joignot *le chevalier. "Suivez moi jeune homme!"* He hoped the ladies were comfortable in Paris? No longer furtive, his large eyes became full of meaning.

To Ursula the process seemed interminable. The first thing necessary was to secure *un domicile conjugal* from which M. Kent should have theoretically strayed. But M. Joignot would attend to all that himself—too many chefs he spoil ze potage, eh? In fact, M. Joignot thought that he knew of just the place on the left bank of the Seine, on the Rue de l'Odéon—a *petite maison et atelier.* With Madame's permission he would see what could be done about a short lease at a nominal rental? Once the suit was started Mrs. Kent could stay where she liked.

So could Mr. Kent, only it would be necessary for the latter to have an address at which he should appear to be living after having abandoned Mrs. Kent and where all legal papers could be served upon him. This so-called "*actual domicile*" would be at 49 Rue des Catalans.

"But," expostulated Ursula, "how do you know that Mr. Kent will be domiciled at forty-nine Rue des Catalans?"

"He will be domiciled at forty-nine Rue des Catalans," declared M. Joignot with conviction.

"But how can you be sure?" she insisted.

"Because," explained M. Joignot sagely, "it is the house of my brother-in-law's mother."

Ursula concluded that it must be the universal custom for the defendant in every French divorce case to be domiciled at the house of his wife's attorney's brother-in-law's mother. Indeed, she somehow received the impression from M. Joignot that if one were not so domiciled it would arouse the suspicion of the French courts and play havoc with justice. Mr. Kent, having his "actual domicile" at 49 Rue des Catalans, could live at the "Crillon," or anywhere else he chose. *Comprenez vous, Madame?* Monsieur need not even remain in Paris! Once the process had been begun—which would require only a few days—he could go about as he liked.

The odor of cabbage had become more and more insistent as the interview had progressed, and M. Joignot's polished eye had begun to lose its intensity. He would expect them to-morrow, then? He sat up, dislodging an unsuspected tobacco ash from the folds of his waistcoat. Ursula and Enid arose also. The child behind the partition was crying vigorously. M. Joignot gallantly pulled aside the rose-colored portières and escorted them to the door of the apartment. The prim woman at the type-

writer again stopped her picking and followed them silently with her eyes. On the threshold the *avocat* fervently shook hands with them both. Ursula observed that his nails were immaculate.

"*Au 'voir, mesdames!*"

"*Au 'voir, m'sieur!*"

The first step in dissolving the marriage bond entered into between Charles Kent and Enid Weybridge, by which they had sworn to be faithful unto one another until death should them part, had been taken under the laws of France.

Ursula's distaste for M. Joignot, engendered by his appearance and environment, was not lessened for her by the discovery that he advertised his superiority as a divorce specialist upon the hoardings of Paris, along with the purveyors of pills and perfumes. On their way back to the hotel, just opposite the Ile de la Cité, their taxi having been stopped by a passing funeral, Ursula's eye was caught by a huge yellow bill several feet square, affixed to a neighboring wall.

Cabinet jurisdique des Grands Boulevards

AVOCAT

Préstation de serment du 12 Fevrier 1895

Me Hugues Joignot

Consultations

Direction de tous procès, enquêtes, filatures, etc.

DIVORCES RAPIDES

Tous renseignements

150 bis Rue de Liège 150

English Spoken.

M. Joignot telephoned later in the afternoon that by great good fortune he had been able to secure the very house he had in mind on the Rue de l'Odéon for their *domicile conjugal*, and that it would be ready for occupancy on the morrow. It proved, to Ursula's surprise, to be such a picturesque little place that it tended, perhaps illogically, to reëstablish for the moment her confidence in his professional ability. Just around the corner from the roar of the Boulevard Raspail, one entered a narrow passage between high walls, that debouched unexpectedly upon a green door opening into a pebbled garden in the very middle of a block of tumble-down ivy-grown *ateliers*. There was a tiny house with a mansard roof on one side and an equally tiny studio upon the other, and bits of statuary covered with green mould lay here and there under the walls or, propped up in corners, peered out at one from among the ivy. It was so altogether charming that it was at first difficult to understand why the tenants, who were said to be on a sketching trip in Brittany, should ever want to go away. The mystery was explained when Louise, the ancient concierge, stated casually that the artists who lived there made a regular business of leasing the establishment, including Louise herself, the cat, and all the paraphernalia appurtenant and adjacent thereto, to American ladies and gentlemen who desired a temporary *domicile conjugal* in the Department of the Seine. It was, according to her, "*une bonne affaire*"—for Monsieur et Madame received from their numerous tenants more than enough to pay the entire rent. Monsieur et Madame, indeed, had moved out that very afternoon, leaving the evidences of their haste behind them in the shape of a heap of unwashed dishes, a pile of soiled linen, and an open can of sardines, which Louise had overlooked.

Ursula was not surprised to find that in spite of its quaint atmosphere the place had no lure for her sister. It was much too far from the Rue de la Paix, for one thing; it was also undeniably dirty; and most of the charm was dispelled upon the discovery that the real owner of the establishment was none other than M. Joignot's brother-in-law—the same who furnished the mother at 49 Rue des Catalans, and who leased the *maison* to the artists under a gentleman's agreement that they should remove themselves upon demand at a moment's notice. Enid said it was all too disgusting—she was not going to live in a pigsty for anybody, law or no law! Her resolution to ignore the customary legal requirements was somewhat shaken, however, by Louise's assertion that most of the ladies made a practice of sleeping there at least one night, and by her further request for a photograph of Monsieur Kent, in order that she might be able to describe him to the police should they take it into their heads to call. She assured Enid that she need not worry, however. Once in a great while only a gendarme might come to make sure that the parties really lived where they said they did. In that case, if there had been two or more couples using it as a conjugal establishment in rapid succession, so that she was in doubt as to which one the police were looking up, Louise made it appear that they all had lived there together, somehow. A hundred-franc note always made things perfectly plain to the gendarmes.

Ursula's suspicion that her sister was dealing with a charlatan, which had been heightened by the sight of the advertisement, had crystallized rapidly into a conviction that the course engineered by M. Joignot, if not fraudulent and illegal, was at least an undignified and vulgar subterfuge, involving false representations and possible

bribery, and she was worried that this aspect of the matter did not seem to disturb Enid more than it did.

"Don't you think you've made a mistake in your lawyer?" she hazarded as they rattled down the Rue de Rivoli. "I don't like the idea of your having to pretend that you live where you don't. Is all this evasion necessary? Why not go to a more reputable firm, one that doesn't advertise?"

She could feel the instant hardening of Enid's manner.

"M. Joignot knows his business," replied her sister. "He got Teeny's second divorce, she says, and the only reason she isn't using him in this one is because Jimmy has some relative over here he wants to help along professionally. These things are always done over here. They may seem a little irregular to Americans, but they don't to the French. Anyhow, it's too late to change."

"It's not too late to consult some other reputable attorney and find out whether or not what M. Joignot is advising you to do is legal. Personally I have grave doubts about it."

Enid tapped impatiently with her foot.

"Well, even if you have, it's my funeral, not yours."

Her tone was palpably hostile.

"But you said you wanted me to help you!" protested Ursula, puzzled and hurt by her sister's attitude.

"I do. Your suggestion isn't helpful, that's all!"

"I don't want you to do anything dishonorable!"

"I'm not doing anything dishonorable!"

"Saying you live in a place when you don't live there is dishonest, isn't it?"

"That's only a quibble. I could live there if I wanted to. I could move in any time."

"But Charles has never lived there. And you are going

to swear that he does, when he has never put his foot inside the door!"

"He is paying the rent. It's his house. Maybe it is stretching things a little, but the law is as full of hocus-pocus in America as it is in France!"

"Respectable people don't have to avail themselves of it!" retorted Ursula, as the taxi stopped in front of the hotel and the porter hurried forth to hand them out.

Enid did not reply, and the subject was not again referred to during dinner. It was clear to Ursula that her sister would brook no interference with her affairs. Her determination had something implacable and ruthless about it. She would have her divorce regardless! Could it be that if Enid were willing to avail herself of falsehood and chicanery to gain what she wanted, her statements regarding the case itself were equally unreliable? Was Charles or was Enid really to blame for their unhappiness? He had been the first to complain! But, according to Enid, it was she, not he, who wanted the divorce. Could she have some other end in view in divorcing him? At any rate, Ursula could not lend herself to any such legal deception as M. Joignot seemed to think necessary, and she told her sister so before going to bed. The next morning Enid departed alone for M. Joignot's. She did not return to lunch, and Ursula was left to her own devices.

It was several years since she had been in Paris, and there was so much to see! Yet as she fingered the pages of her guide-book it all seemed so futile! Why should she go to see anything? Her life was over! She could not keep her mind off Peter, try as she would. What was he doing at that moment? Was he sitting at his desk, or, owing to the five hours difference in time, had he not yet reached his office? Was he, possibly, thinking of her

as she was of him? Had her abrupt departure seemed too cruel to him? She could not bear the thought that he harbored any resentment toward her for what she had done!

Sitting there by the window in the thin Parisian sunlight, her loneliness was intensified by the consciousness that, passing along the sidewalks of the Rue de la Paix just below and even housed within the hotel itself, were doubtless scores of Americans whom she knew, yet who were nothing to her. Already she felt a barrier raising itself between Enid and herself. Why was it? Her sister was the person closest to her by blood in all the world. She had no reason to doubt the truth of what Enid had told her about Charles' infidelity. Her own eyes had furnished her with a certain amount of corroborative evidence. Yet the readiness displayed by her sister to avail herself of M. Joignot's elaborate chicanery gave her a new and unpleasant light upon Enid's character. She was clearly quite willing to do whatever he might tell her to be necessary. Had this obtuseness to moral standards been acquired by her only since her arrival in Paris? Had she deceived her about the trip? She had certainly not told her the whole truth. Enid now confessed that the plan to secure the divorce in Paris had been made in New York and that she had come there with a premeditated intent. Charles must have started before they had! In the light of what had transpired, Ursula perceived that Enid had, to all intents and purposes, by concealing her real purposes and suppressing all the facts which might arouse any suspicions as to their nature, deliberately lied to her. The realization made her almost sick. What was back of it all? Whom could she believe?

How she longed for some one to whom she could cling, some one whose ideals of truth and honor were as high

as her own, some one to whom she could turn for advice and comfort—for Peter, in short. For all her thoughts eventually brought her back to Peter, and it was his face that looked out at her from every frame as she wandered that afternoon through the endless galleries of the Louvre.

It was but a minute or two before five, and the guardians of art had begun to scowl furtively at too persistent worshippers when Ursula, standing in a semi-trance near the threshold of the Salon Carré, heard her name and turned to find Charles at her elbow. He looked so old and sallow that all her pity went out to him as he extended his hand timidly, lest she refuse to take it.

"Glad you're still willing to speak to me!" he said. "I had no idea you were coming to Paris, Ursula."

"Nor I!" she answered. The custodian was walking toward them, rattling his keys. "Let's go somewhere where we can talk."

Already she knew that she would believe whatever he might tell her. They left the building and went into the Tuileries Gardens, but there were no benches there, and they kept on into the sunken park at the foot of the Champs Elysées, where a "*guignol*" was squawking to the delight of a crowd of children.

"You're looking well," he said. It was as if he had seen her only the day before, and everything was still the same as ever. It was the same as ever—so far as they were concerned. They sat down on two small iron chairs at a distance from the "*guignol.*" Charles took off his hat and laid it in his lap. Without it he looked older than ever.

"Enid's got me!" he said without further preliminary. "That woman has got me!—I don't suppose I ought to speak that way before you about your sister?"

"I want to hear whatever you have to tell me."

He seemed greatly relieved, although not altogether surprised.

"Did she tell you what she was coming over for?"

"Not until we got here. Not until I had seen you on the street."

"Well—you can believe me or not, as you choose—I've had a job put up on me—I've been 'framed,' as they say. You remember the night you saw me at that Fallen Angels place? I should have come to see you after that—given you the explanation—you were entitled to it—but I was embarrassed. You see, the night you dined with us—your birthday it was!—and we had that talk, I did just as you advised me—followed Enid up-stairs and told her I loved her, and asked her to be a little kind to me. She was sitting in front of her dressing-table, taking down her hair—and she never even stopped combing it or once looked at me. It was fierce! I knew then that it was all over—for good."

He scrunched the pebbles with his heel.

"She went off next day on Blair's yacht, and I was left all alone down there. Pretty desperate, I tell you! Things played straight into their hands. He had his detectives on me all the time, of course."

"He? Who do you mean?" But she had sensed the answer before she got it. It was as if a curtain had been suddenly raised before her eyes, and she were looking into the past. That was why Enid had so resented Charles' suggestion that Blair might make a good husband for her.

"Blair, of course!—If I hadn't been a moron I'd have had sense enough to know it. I got bumming around just so I wouldn't have to go down to the country alone. That's how I ran into that old war-horse you saw me

with. She used to be out in Bisbee. I hadn't seen her in ten years, and we had a couple of drinks together and swapped yarns about old times, and I saw her home. Anything else—! Why, one look at her would have been enough to satisfy a jury—! By George!"

He sat up suddenly and ran his fingers through his sparse hair.

"I wonder if it could have been a plant all the time! It might have been—easily enough!—anyhow, they were covering me, and once I went into her room, the detectives did the rest! Well, I guess I'm not the first man that's been played for a sucker that way. No one was ever caught neater. At first I thought I'd fight—it seemed such a dirty trick to put over on a man! I couldn't stomach having Blair tell me I'd got to give him my wife and kids or get out! Then I realized that nothing in the world would stop Enid, who would sacrifice anything she had, to get what she wanted—including her own children, and I couldn't take the chance of ruining their lives. She'd have ploughed the whole family into the furrow—dragged them through the mire! That's why I'm over here. She knows perfectly well I never had anything to do with that old hag. So does Blair. They both know I've always played straight. But they've got me, and I've no choice but to do as they say or be disgraced before my own children. This way, at least, I can get off with a charge of cruelty!"

He smiled ironically.

"Cruelty! Me! I say, Ursula, you never thought I was cruel, did you?"

"Poor Charles! No, I should never accuse you of that!"

The kindly things he was always doing flooded her memory. There never had been a sweeter, more devoted

father than Charles. And Enid was stabbing him to death before her very eyes! She must intervene to prevent this murder, if she could.

Dusk like the bloom of purple grapes loitered beneath the alleys of the Champs Elysées to follow the lamplighter toward where the Arc du Triomphe with its undying fire barred the way to a heaven of blue and saffron. The Tuileries were bathed in a lilac glow, and the mirror of the Seine, silver along the parapets, was lavender below the bridges. Was all this beauty but the iridescence of decay?

"Tell me everything—from the very beginning," she said—and in a monotone, broken only by the squawks of the "*guignol*" and the screams of the children, Charles recounted to her the tragedy of his life. It was dark by the time that he had finished, the "*guignol*"-man had boarded up his booth and gone away, and the Place de la Concord was a pool of soft light in which they seemed to swim as they crossed it in silence.

"Strange that a woman as beautiful as you are has never married, Ursula!" he remarked, as they reached the Rue de Rivoli. He made the statement judicially, not as a mere effort to finish their conference on a more cheerful note. "You ought to have, long ago. I know it would be hard to find any one half good enough for you. But even if he was only half as good he'd be better than most! Funny for me to be a booster for matrimony, isn't it! But marriage is all right. It is not good that man should live alone. I don't suppose many marriages are what you'd call happy, but I don't see that that's any particular argument against it. I'm not sorry I was married—even to Enid! I've got more out of it than I ever did out of anything else—things neither she nor anybody can take away from me!"

They had paused under a street lamp near the entrance of the Hotel Mirabeau, and its light fell full upon his slightly uplifted face as he raised it to Ursula's. In his watery eyes there was a look not altogether earthly. She knew that what Charles said was true, that he owed whatever good there was in him to what he had put into his marriage. With Enid it was the reverse. For her it was worse than a failure, since she had married without love, and she was leaving it poorer than when she had gone into it. But Charles was richer by far. There was no comparison between the loyal, sincere, and kindly middle-aged man he now was and the rather selfish bachelor he had been.

Enid, returning with Teeny in a taxi from the Ritz, saw Charles take Ursula's hand in both of his and half raise it to his lips as he said: "You're an angel, Ursula! —If only I had married *you!*"

The high, cackling laughter that Ursula recognized as Teeny's stopped suddenly as she opened the door of the sitting-room. Mrs. Allyn and Enid, gowned in the extremest of short skirts, were stretched cross-legged amid the carnage of the day's shopping expedition, smoking scented cigarettes in long pink holders, and surrounded by tissue paper and empty boxes. Hats and evening gowns hung from every chair back.

"Hello, Ursula!" called Teeny, without arising. "Excuse my not getting up—these skirts are so tight. I've joined the Alimony Club, you see!"

Enid remained silent.

"I thought you were a life member already!" Ursula could not help replying. For some inexplicable reason she did not particularly object to Teeny. Mrs. Allyn grinned at her forbearingly.

"I guess I deserve that crack!" she admitted. "But

you'd be here yourself if you'd ever walked with a man up the aisle of a church. Honestly, I don't see why women marry! But I always seem to. It's a habit, I suppose." She kicked aside one of the boxes and staggered to her feet. "Well, I must go back to dress. Come and have tea with me some time, Ursula, won't you? About five, almost any day."

Enid escorted her friend to the elevator, and then returned to the sitting-room. In the insufficient electric light her features, under her frivolous new hat, looked smaller, more pinched than ever.

"Well," she said coolly, "what have you been doing all day?"

Neither had sat down, and they stood facing one another at a distance of some ten feet. It came over Ursula that here was one of the most heartless women in the world, if not of all time—a woman wholly evil.

"I have just seen Charles," she answered.

Enid stepped to the centre table and reached into the cigarette box.

"What did he have to say for himself?" she asked, striking a match and glancing across the flame.

But the expression on her sister's face was such that she laid down the match without lighting her cigarette.

"What is the matter?" she demanded. "Has Charles been filling you up with a lot of his guff?"

"He has told me everything."

"Well?"

"You have not told me the truth, Enid." The words were a condemnation.

"I haven't lied to you—if that's what you mean. I merely didn't tell you everything. I didn't want to upset you."

Enid struck another match. Now that they were under way, the eerie feeling she had at first experienced had gone.

"Why didn't you tell me about Carter Blair?"

"What have I to tell you about him? He has nothing to do with my getting a divorce from Charles. I am divorcing my husband simply because he has been unfaithful to me. You know that. I am justified both by the laws of the state and the doctrines of the church. My conscience is clear."

Ursula took a step toward her sister. Enid had never before realized her height. She was almost terrifying, she was so tall. In the shrouded half-light she was very white, very terrible to Enid. Her eyes were like two black stars, both sad and terrible.

"Enid!" she said, "don't let us have any pretenses about this thing. Let us at least have the truth between us. You are divorcing Charles in order to marry Carter Blair! That is your real reason. There is no need for you to break up your home and take Charles' children away from him simply because, after you had neglected him for ten years and had been away for two weeks on another man's yacht, he went once, out of sheer loneliness, with another woman. He says he did not, and I believe him. But it wouldn't make any difference even if he had. You would be to blame in either case!"

Enid began to get angry.

"I—to blame? What are you talking about? You speak as if I were the one who had been unfaithful—not he!"

"You have been! If Charles has broken his marriage vow, so did you—first! The marriage contract has a positive as well as a negative side, hasn't it? A woman doesn't fulfil her whole duty to her husband by not com-

mitting adultery with another man? There's something more to marriage than that, isn't there?"

Enid was shocked at such words proceeding from the mouth of her unmarried sister.

"Ursula!" she exclaimed. "How can you talk like that! What do you know about marriage! If you come to that, what do you know about life!"

Ursula had grown whiter than ever.

"Does one have to be married to know the meaning of a contract?"

Enid blew a funnel of smoke from her narrowing mouth.

"Why don't you talk about things you know something of! Marriage is a mystery—a spiritual union. The merely carnal aspect of it is nothing. It is wrong for a woman to give herself to a man she does not love, even her husband. To do so would be loathsome. I thought myself in love with my husband when I married him, just as every woman does, I suppose; but I found I was mistaken. That's all there is to it!"

She almost spat the words.

"That is not the point! I don't pretend to know anything about the ethics of marriage under the circumstances you describe. I don't know whether you loved Charles or even thought you loved him when you married him. I do know that he loved you. He has always been a devoted husband and father. I do not believe for a moment that you think he has been unfaithful to you, and even if you did, I don't believe you would break up your home simply on that account. At any rate, I hope you would not!"

"You are quite wrong!"

"No," said Ursula, "that is just a subterfuge. You are divorcing Charles for a wholly different reason, and

you would divorce him irrespective of whether he had been unfaithful to you or not. You are doing a cruel wrong both to him and to your children."

"I am doing what any woman would do."

"You know you are not, Enid. You are divorcing the husband by whom you have had three children in order to marry a richer man."

"I am divorcing a husband who has been unfaithful to me and with whom I can no longer live and keep my self-respect. I have no choice in the matter."

"Are you not planning to marry Carter Blair?"

Enid squirmed.

"Well, what if I am? I love him. What more do you want?"

"You couldn't love a man like that, Enid. He's not your sort."

"I tell you I love him. That is enough."

"I've seen you together, Enid. You're not really in love with him. I don't call that being in love."

Enid saw her chance and turned upon her sister.

"What do you know about love?" she taunted. "You're nothing but an old maid."

There was no sound in the room but the faint rattle of traffic from behind the closed windows.

"You are mistaken," answered Ursula quietly, looking straight at her sister. "I know all about love. I have been in love and—I have had a lover."

Enid stared at her. Was Ursula utterly mad?

"Don't talk nonsense!" she scoffed.

"I'm not talking nonsense," continued Ursula in an even voice. "I know what I am talking about, because I know what true love is. And I know that you do not love Carter Blair. You are not marrying him for that, but for his—what he can give you."

Enid no longer doubted Ursula's sincerity, and the revelation left her for the moment speechless. She was genuinely shocked. How could Ursula have managed to fool them all so? She must be a great deal cleverer than she had given her credit for. And how immoral! It was terrible! It showed that you could never really know anybody. She would as soon have suspected a Mother Superior! And who could the man be? She searched all the corners of her recollection. Longwood? Brookfield? Neither seemed likely. Ursula had been foxy! Yet what struck Enid as most astounding of all was that, if the thing were true, Ursula should admit it!

"And you can tell of it!" she sneered.

"Why not? I'm not ashamed of it!"

This unbelievable thing was true, then! She lifted her skirt a trifle and stepped back.

"I never thought I should have a prostitute for a sister!" she cried witheringly.

"Call me what you like!—I know what true love is!" repeated Ursula without faltering.

Enid waded through the tissue paper toward the door of her bedroom.

"Well, for heaven's sake, don't go 'round blabbing your shame to anybody else. And don't ever mention Mr. Blair's name to me again, if you please. I'll manage my own affairs after this without your help."

Her fingers felt for the bell and pressed it. Suddenly she burst into a raucous laugh, as if some thought were excruciatingly funny. "I see it all now! What a simpleton I've been! O dear!" She made a helpless gesture with her right hand. "Please don't let me—keep you from your lover!"

She disappeared through the door, leaving Ursula standing motionless amid the boxes. After a few minutes

she came out, carrying a small bag. The *valet de chambre* was waiting.

"Take this down-stairs, please," said Enid, handing him the bag. "I'll send for my luggage later. And order me a taxi. I'm leaving at once. You may tell them in the office."

The *valet de chambre* took the bag and opened the door for Enid.

"Where are you going, madame?" he inquired.

"To the Ritz!" she replied, without so much as looking at her sister—and stepped out of Ursula's life forever.

CHAPTER XIII

THE *valet de chambre* closed the door softly behind him, leaving Ursula alone in the disordered suite. The scene with Enid had shaken her soul, and she sank weakly into the nearest fauteuil. She knew that in all probability she would never see Enid again. With the closing of that door her sister had passed out of her life with the unexpectedness and finality of sudden death. First Peter, then Enid! Only Gay remained—Gay and poor Charles. If Gay should side with her mother, there would be nobody left for whom she deeply cared. Was life just a succession of closing doors, until one was left entirely alone in an empty chamber? How devastating the results of Enid's ruthless cupidity had already been! And how many, many lives could be affected by the disrupting of a single marriage! It was like cutting a thread and unravelling a seam. Cut enough of them, and the whole fabric would fall apart. How could Enid have done such a thing? How could she have called her such a name! It was a lie! She was not that sort of woman. If Enid only knew—! But it would have made no difference!

She did not feel that she had done wrong in loving Peter as she had; and she knew that she had done right in leaving him. Even if she had erred in the first place, had she not paid full penance by giving him up? She had been wholly unselfish in that. He had been hers—hers to hold forever, if she would; yet she had left him voluntarily, in order that he might be free to build his life untrammelled. Greater love hath no man, the Saviour had said, than that he lay down his life for his friend. Had she not sacrificed her life for the man she loved, fully as

much as if she had died for him? Surely she had! She could not have done more. She would just as readily have died for him as do what she had done.

Enid had at least been the stepping-stone across the chasm which now separated him from her, for without Enid she never would have had the courage to leave him. What strange coincidences life supplied! Had it not been for Enid's deserting Charles, she would, herself, probably never have left home. She might even have married Peter by this time. What would she not give to have him there now! She had no friends in Paris—nobody but Charles, at least, and he would be sailing in a few days, as soon as the divorce papers had been served upon him. There was nothing for her to do in Paris—and nobody to do it with, if there had been. It would take her months to resurrect her old acquaintances.

As she gazed around the huge, sparsely furnished sitting-room, filled with the scattered evidences of Enid's extravagance, her courage oozed away. She could not remain in Paris by herself! She would go mad from loneliness. Why not go back with Charles? Somebody would have to keep "The Mews" running and look after the children until the divorce was settled. Gay was wholly unreliable. Was it not her duty to go back? Ought she to leave Charles in the lurch? It was her last chance! Outside in the Rue de la Paix she could hear the funny little fish-horn toots of the taxis, so different from the long, metallic scream of the American Klaxon. "Go-home! Go-home! Go-home!" they said. The click of the elevator in the hall outside was never-ending. The hotel throbbed with a ceaseless, subdued, unseen life that had nothing to do with her.

The little Sèvres clock on the mantel wheezed seven times, and she arose, bathed her face and eyes, and went

down into the dining-room. There was not one face she knew at any of the tables. She was an alien in a city swarming with her compatriots. Was it not foolish for her to stay there? Why not get in touch with Charles that very evening and ask him to make a reservation on the steamer for her? Perhaps by this time Peter would already have come to share her opinion that it was better for them to part. The break had been made, and hence the real purpose of her trip had been accomplished. She need not even notify Peter of her return, or go back to "Folly Farm." She could make the visits she had promised to Diana Kayne and the others. Her staying on in Paris seemed quite unnecessary and rather hysterical.

Surely, now that she had once left Peter and had learned to get along without him she could safely trust herself not to weaken! "Go-back! Go-back! Go-back!" her heart-beats echoed to the taxis. "You have accomplished what you set out to do. There is nothing to be gained by staying away any longer. It is cowardly to hide. You can't remain in Paris all your life. You have duties to perform at home. Go-back! Go-back!"

On her way to the elevator she paused uncertainly for an instant at the desk of the concierge, thinking that she could at least ascertain what steamers were to sail in the near future. A messenger from the cable company was standing there opening his leather wallet, having just come in.

"It is for you, mademoiselle," said the concierge, holding out a telegram.

Her hand shook as she took it and her eyes swam as she hurried to the elevator. There was not the slightest doubt in her mind from whom it was.

Sailing for France to-morrow to bring you back.—Peter.

She could feel the blood seethe through her arteries. Oh, he was coming! He was coming! He could not live without her! No need to go back now! She could not go back, since in that case he would miss her! She must wait for him! Sailing to-morrow? He would be with her in less than a week!

And then she saw all at once that she had been listening to her heart and not to her head; that the only reason why she had wished to return home was to see and to be with Peter once more; that nothing had been changed by her leaving him. Refusing to accept her decision, he was following hot-foot after her, and the whole purpose of her coming to Paris—to give him opportunity to find out how he felt after a genuine and prolonged separation—would be frustrated should she allow him to do so.

Her encounter with Enid had so shocked, wounded, and generally upset her that she had not been able to think connectedly. She had been nearly stampeded by loneliness, that was all. She had been away from Peter only three weeks, and one of those weeks had been spent in America! He had been subjected to no test. Nothing less than three months' probation would be of the slightest value. She saw herself once more back at "Folly Farm," living there with a Peter unable to tear himself away from her, and all the reasons which had led up to her original decision recurred to her with renewed force. She had been absolutely right! Now that the hardest part of all—the first break—had been successfully accomplished, she could not throw everything away! He must not be permitted to come! She must forbid his sailing. Neither must she play hide-and-seek with him by crossing him upon the ocean. And, finally, if he came in defiance of her request, she must refuse to receive him. It was all plain enough to her now. She must stay over.

It would not be difficult to pass a couple of months in Brittany or Switzerland. Once more descending to the office, she dispatched a cable to Peter, asking him not to sail, and threatening, if he did so, not to see him.

CHAPTER XIV

ENID'S accession was welcomed with enthusiasm by the divorce colony at the Ritz. She was surprised to find so many New York acquaintances who, while living there quite openly, made no secret of the fact that they were supposed to be residing at their lawyer's brother-in-law's mother's. They had that sense of comradeship that comes from serving the same cause. All were united in their common love of freedom. "There's another of us," Teeny would say, pointing across the tea-room. "That's Julie Joy, of Cincinnati, who married that soap person. I met her coming out of M. Kelly's this morning and she gave me the high sign. The woods are full of 'em!" On the whole Enid was relieved to be rid of Ursula, feeling that, having once got her away from America before the show-down, the sooner it was over the better. In her new, glittering life with Carter, an unattached sister would be a liability rather than an asset.

The Ritz, she found, suited her much better than the Mirabeau, which was just quietly respectable. She liked the attention paid her by the maître d'hôtel and the suave young gentlemen who represented the invisible management—the swank of the crowded tea-room—to hear herself "paged" by the smart little chasseurs. The suite which she now shared with her friend Teeny was infinitely more comfortable than the one she had had at the Mirabeau, and looked directly down into the Place Vendôme. They could sit at their window and with the aid of opera-glasses see just who went in and out of Morgan's. That the suite was also infinitely more ex-

pensive than the other did not bother her. She was already discounting the fact that she was to be the wife of a multi-millionaire. Whatever she spent now Carter would see was repaid to her a hundred times over later on.

Her closet was lined with slinky evening dresses and creamy afternoon costumes from Paquin's and Poiret's, the envy of Teeny, who as yet had not decided on her next husband, and was ridding herself of Allyn merely on general principles. Together they lunched at the fashionable restaurants, spent the afternoons up to five o'clock in forays upon modistes and dressmakers, had tea at the Ritz or Rumpelmeyer's, in company with a select circle of female compatriots engaged upon the same errand as themselves, with whom they later dined in state at one or another of the smart hotels. Getting divorced became simply a round of pleasure. Everything was so easy! The best that life could offer was to be had for practically nothing in American money; the best manicures and beauty specialists, the best confectioners and hairdressers right in one's hotel; no domestic worries, no engaging of servants, no children to bother one, no trouble about entertaining; the luxury of ancient Rome, the freedom of Tahiti, the culture of Palm Beach—all for the equivalent of twelve dollars per day.

Occasionally some man she had known in New York, Newport, or Westbury would ask Enid out for the evening, and they would go first to the play, then to supper, and afterwards to Zelli's, the Jardin de Ma Sœur, or the Caveau Caucasien, where, crushed against cocottes, cheap Englishmen, and blatant Americans, she would dance until three or four o'clock in the morning. It was, indeed, a second blooming for Enid, and Teeny said she had never seen anybody who lapped it up so.

Her mornings, however, were devoted to serious business, for M. Joignot required her presence almost daily. The first step had, of course, been the service of the "*summation*" upon Charles. This had been done a couple of days after her arrival, and—although it was usually necessary under the French procedure for the wife to appear alone before the judge and ask permission to cite her husband "*en conciliation*" before him, after which the "*summation*" was issued and served by the sheriff—M. Joignot had managed to secure the issuance of the "*summation*" without her appearance before the judge by making it seem that she was ill or temporarily out of the jurisdiction or something of the sort. At any rate, there was nothing left to do except to wait for "*le conciliation*" ceremony, which would take place in about two weeks. Meantime they must prepare the "*assignation*," or bill of complaint, with great care, and have it all ready to serve upon the defendant as soon as the judge should find that she and Charles could not be "reconciled." It was of the utmost importance, he assured her, that the allegations contained in the "*assignation*" should be absolutely exact, and he insisted upon going over them all with her again and again. He also exhibited an extreme curiosity as to her former relations with her husband and repeatedly expressed the deepest sympathy for her unfortunate situation.

"Ah, madame! *Vous avez mes consolations les plus profondes!*" He hinted that he, too, was not altogether felicitously suited. Enid, however, cut all that end of it short, without, so far as could be observed, M. Joignot's taking any particular offense. The "*summation*," besides the preliminary statement that the couple had up to that time been residents of France and domiciled at 80 Rue d'Assas, alleged that the domestic harmony that

had hitherto hovered over the marital abode had been cruelly shattered by the repeated absences of Monsieur Kent on the pretext of travel, until he was practically never there at all, that Madame Kent had followed Monsieur Kent about in the hope that she could recover his affections and that he would once more return to the "*foyer conjugal*," but that all her efforts had been in vain, and that in spite of her supplications he had refused ever to live with her again.

It went on to say, also, that owing to being thus repulsed by Monsieur Kent and her dejection at the failure of her overtures, together with his generally heartless treatment of her, the health of Madame Kent had been seriously affected with grave nervous symptoms, all of which had been made the subject of careful study "*par le Docteur Bodin médecin de la Pitié, chevalier de la légion d'honneur*," who had issued his certificate to that effect.

When Enid raised some question about le Docteur Bodin, whom she had never seen, M. Joignot waved the objection aside with a bland "*Ce n'est rien!*—He will do it!"

It appeared, to her surprise, that Enid had written various letters to Monsieur Kent, beseeching him to return to "*le domicile conjugal*," to which he had replied that he had found life with her so insupportable that he proposed thereafter to continue his individual existence "*en toute liberté et indépendance.*"

The document having been at length completed, so that it was no longer necessary for Enid to visit M. Joignot's office, the *avocat* developed the habit of calling upon her at the Ritz. He would arrive almost every day at about five o'clock, looking as if he were a lay figure advertising the latest thing in French mourning. In his

enormous black cutaway coat, black trousers, black Ascot tie, and black silk hat, Enid always felt as if he were there to make arrangements for a funeral. She was afraid to offend him, yet his appearance so embarrassed her that she solved the difficulty by receiving him in her apartment. It was better than sniffing cabbage at 150 bis Rue de Liège. After a while she did not particularly mind the odor of "*Suivez moi jeune homme.*" Perhaps Teeny was right about it being good business to vamp your lawyer. The third time he called M. Joignot carried a beautiful round bouquet surrounded by a frill of crimped paper.

In spite of M. Joignot's great solicitude, Enid looked forward to the ordeal with an apprehension amounting almost to horror. How could she be sure that Charles would really go through with it? Suppose it were only a trick upon his part, and that when the crucial moment came he should state that, so far from wishing for a divorce, he proposed to continue to live with her?

Minutely she questioned Joignot as to the procedure. An, but it was of the simplest, he assured her. You and your husband went alone on the appointed day before the judge in the Palais de Justice, and he asked each of you but a single question: Could you not manage to go on living together? You said "*Non*," your husband said "*Non*," the judge said it was unfortunate, and signed a report recommending the divorce.

That was all there was to it—just that mere "No" from both parties. A few weeks later a higher court would pass on the report, and if there was no objection would grant a preliminary, or interlocutory decree, which went into effect automatically at the end of two months. During those two months either party could back out or raise legal objections to the divorce, if he or she saw

fit; otherwise that was the end of it. One could not remarry in France during that time, because one was not yet fully divorced, but one could go somewhere else—England, Belgium, or Spain, for instance—and marry as soon as the preliminary decree had been granted, and the French courts, having no jurisdiction, could say nothing about it. *Très facile, n'est pas?*

Enid decided that she would like to see for herself exactly how it was done, and accordingly paid a visit one sweltering morning to the Palais de Justice, accompanied by M. Joignot. The huge corridor at the top of the flight of white marble steps swarmed with anxious citizens with their black-robed *avocats*, each with his brief-case stuffed with papers, but the throng was greatest before the door at the extreme left, where a crowd of men and women of every class, age, and occupation—navvies, soldiers, small shopkeepers, taxi-drivers, with an occasional shamefaced person of obviously greater refinement—were struggling to get as near the courtroom as possible. Over there a couple were engaged in a fierce altercation that threatened to degenerate into a fist fight; here a young girl carrying a baby was sobbing against a pillar; while one old peasant woman with a nutcracker face had sat herself down complacently upon the stone floor.

From time to time the door opened and a man and woman would emerge and hurry away. Following this, a clerk or beadle would thrust out his head and shout the name of some other couple, and those summoned would force their way through the crowd and enter. When this happened Enid could look through the door into a waiting-room and into still another and smaller room beyond, where a man in spectacles was seated at a table before a pile of papers. He never looked up as the plaintiff and defendant came in, and he was always ex-

amining the papers on the table before him in precisely the same position when they came out again, which was in only a minute or two.

"*C'est ça!*" nodded M. Joignot. "It goes quickly enough, does it not?"

Enid was forced to admit that it certainly did go quickly enough to suit the most insistent upon speed.

As the day set for her appearance approached Enid became more and more nervous. So much depended upon what might occur when she and Charles faced one another in that little room. The thought of going in there alone with him filled her with dismay. He might misunderstand the judge's question, unintentionally say "*oui*" when he meant "*non*"—he knew practically no French,—or even make some sort of a scene. What a farce, this pretense of trying to "reconcile" two people who were, both, eager and anxious to get rid of one another!

She was up and dressed hours before it was necessary, staring out nervously into the empty Place Vendôme. For the first time it struck her as in any way peculiar that she, an American woman, should be there, three thousand miles from home, asking a French court to divorce her from an American husband by whom she had had three children, all of whom were in America.

At that early hour in the morning Paris seemed excessively French. How could she know to what preposterous allegations M. Joignot might have committed her without her knowledge? Suppose she were arrested for perjury or for violating some unknown French statute? That gendarme down there by the column, in his shiny leather belt, had a sinister appearance.

Just then Teeny, in a pink dressing-gown trimmed with eiderdown, and smoking a cigarette, came in hold-

ing a copy of the Paris edition of the New York *Herald*.

"Seen that, Enid?" she inquired, pointing ominously to a spread on the front page. "Looks like some wise guy had thrown a wrench into our machinery!"

Enid, who had had no breakfast, felt suddenly queer.

"What has happened?" she asked apprehensively.

"You've got eyes. Read it!" directed Teeny.

FRENCH GOVERNMENT TO END COLLUSIVE AMERICAN DIVORCES SOUGHT IN PARIS COURTS

Americans now in Paris for the purpose of securing relief from their marriage ties may find themselves disappointed as a result of an order of the Ministry of Justice issued yesterday afternoon. Under this order the Judges of the Department of the Seine are instructed to grant no more decrees to foreigners domiciled in Paris unless for a cause recognized as valid in the state where the marriage originally took place.

The order goes into effect at once and applies to all divorces in which the parties have not yet appeared "*en Conciliation.*" The publication of the order, which marks a new era in French divorce law, has completely bewildered the "*avocats*" and "*avoués*" of Paris, who have no knowledge of American divorce or how the "cause, valid in the state where the marriage originally took place," is to be established. At the Bureau de Justice it was stated unofficially that the government had got thoroughly tired of the scandals incident to having the French courts made use of by Americans to secure collusive divorces.

"Don't let that bother you!" said Teeny. "That's only a bluff! The French are glad enough to get us over here and take our money. You can bet there's some loophole in it. Even if there isn't, we can always go ahead and get a divorce for a cause recognized at home. Heavens, there're enough of them!"

"Where were you married?" asked Enid.

Teeny suppressed a yawn, lightly tapping her mouth with the fingers of her unoccupied hand.

"Let me see—where was I last time? Oh, yes!—Rhode Island.—I got my last divorce for excessive cruelty, non-support, and habitual drunkenness. I'm all right. Garry won't mind my charging him with either of those little things. How are you fixed?"

Enid's eyes were stony.

"I was married in New York City," she answered desperately.

"That's bad! There's only one ground in New York."

"That's why we came over here!"

She went to the window. What wretched luck! However, if everything was kept so secret, Charles could probably be induced to let her divorce him for adultery. Perhaps Joignot could merely substitute that ground for the other, or amend the papers so as to include it. If so, and Charles were properly acquiescent, there need be no real delay.

M. Joignot himself arrived shortly after breakfast. It was most unfortunate, he said, just as everything was going so smoothly. They would have to adjourn "*le conciliation*" until they were perfectly sure what they could do, otherwise they might bungle in some way. Nobody, not even the judges, knew exactly what sort of evidence was to be required. Meantime, might he ask, had Madame Kent been married in a state where desertion was recognized as a ground for divorce? Or intemperance? Or lack of sympathy? *Non?* What then? Infidelity? M. Joignot seemed greatly relieved. Surely Monsieur Kent would have no objection to giving Madame Kent one little bit of evidence?—He would be gallant enough for that? *Non?* Then Enid drew from her sleeve her trump card. The fact was, she informed

the *avocat*, that her husband really had been unfaithful to her in New York, and that this could be fully substantiated by oral and written evidence, but he had been induced to come to Paris and accept service of papers there in order that she might secure her divorce on some less opprobrious ground. However, if they could be assured of absolute secrecy, he might be prevailed upon to allow the papers to be amended so that the divorce could still go through. Could M. Joignot promise her that there would be no leakage? The *avocat* assured her with his hand on his heart that the evidence in such cases was kept inviolate.

"It just goes to show," remarked Teeny, who had "listened in" on the interview, "that one ought never to get married in New York!"

Enid passed a miserable day in spite of the fact that she utilized the time she would otherwise have spent in court at her dressmaker's. She had already expended several thousand dollars upon her wedding trousseau, and fully intended to be the best-dressed woman in New York the following winter. Carter liked scarlet, and in her selection of materials she had favored that color. But to-day it palled on her, and she ran to grays and blues. She and Teeny were having tea down-stairs at the Ritz when she was informed that Mr. Waldo Smith, the correspondent of the *New York Times*, craved the indulgence of a few moments' conversation with her. Mr. Smith, who followed hard upon the heels of his emissary, lost no time in coming directly to the point, although he did not explain how he had found out that her "*conciliation*" had been set for that morning.

"We're all naturally anxious to learn what you propose to do, Mrs. Kent. As you did not appear this morning we assumed that the new rule had probably upset

your plans. I cabled over to our office and learned that you had been married in New York State. Of course, I understand you don't want any more publicity than is necessary, but this move of the government's has an international interest, and my boss has instructed me to get an interview."

Enid's brain almost refused to function.

"The question is, are you going on with it? Of course, we're bound to know that in time, anyway, so it really makes no difference to you whether you tell us now or not. But it will help the story a lot if I can run a line to the effect that it will, or will not, alter your plans."

So it was out! Enid could feel her new earrings like icicles against her hot cheeks. To-morrow morning all Long Island would be devouring the story—"The Kent Divorce." Mr. Smith's pale gray eyes were focussed upon her face. She must say something—one way or the other. That the government had upset the apple-cart could be attributed to no fault of hers. Truth would out, in spite of everything!

"The new rule will make no difference whatever in my plans," she said.

The *Herald* next morning gave several columns to the new divorce law, together with many items concerning pending cases which might be affected by it. Among others was the following:

Mrs. Kent, who was interviewed at the Ritz yesterday afternoon, stated that the new requirements of the French law would present no difficulties to a divorce so far as she was concerned, as she had evidence to substantiate the statutory ground required in the State where she and Mr. Kent had been married. Mr. Kent, who is a well-known banker and polo-player, could not be found last night. The couple were married in St. Timothy's Church, New York City, in 1901. They have three children.

The excitement occasioned by the new order gradually subsided in spite of the confusion in the minds of the *avocats* and *avoués* as to what its legal effect might be, and what the courts would thereafter require in the way of additional evidence. Opinions as to this varied widely.

"It's simply disgusting!" Teeny declared. "That horrid Kelly person says I must either have a copy of the Rhode Island laws certified before the French Consul-General to the United States, or at the Embassy in Washington, and sent over here, or find a Rhode Island lawyer in Paris who can testify as to what the laws there are. How on earth could I do that? No Rhode Island lawyer ever had money enough to buy a ticket to Paris! It's going to delay me a couple of months at least! I don't even know if I can hold Garry here that long, with the international polo over on Long Island. You're in luck, after all, Enid. Paris is full of New York lawyers."

M. Joignot assured Enid that there would be little difficulty in satisfying the French courts as to the New York law governing divorce, and, that so far as could be ascertained, the government, once having issued its order, did not wish to be hyper-technical. At his dictation she wrote a carefully phrased series of letters from 80 Rue d'Assas, charging Charles with various acts of infidelity, so antedated as to make said infidelities appear to have covered a period of several years, and demanding that he instantly return to her bed and board; and in due course the *avocat* informed her that he had received replies from Charles, also in his own handwriting, containing what might be construed as a vague admission of the charges and flatly and finally declining to concede to her request to perform his marital duties. The "*assignation*" having been amended to the satisfaction of the lawyers, so as to conform to the supposed requirements of the

new law, the parties were once more ready to proceed.

But the knowledge that what she was about to do was public property, and that from now on she would walk in the limelight, had a curious and totally unexpected effect upon Enid. The pleasing notoriety which she had hitherto enjoyed at the Ritz as "Mrs. Charlie Kent, the well-known New York society woman," now proved embarrassing to her. Whenever she entered the foyer of the hotel, the restaurant, or the tea-room, she fancied that she was being pointed out as the first woman to suffer from the new cloture upon Franco-American divorce. It was one thing to be known as a social leader; another as the standard-bearer of the shoddy crew who were trying to rid themselves of their husbands in "the easiest way."

Enid was game, however. After all, she realized, one must expect a little publicity. Who cared, anyway? So she held her head high and took even more pains than usual with her toilettes. She had no intention of throwing up the sponge like that silly little Mrs. Joy, who, at the first sight of her name in print, had hurried home to her husband and babies in Cincinnati, where there had been more rejoicing over her return than over ninety-and-nine just persons. Enid had not met Ursula since the scene between them at the Mirabeau, and, although she had come to know a large number of the American colony in Paris, she began to feel curiously cut off from her own world. That the irresponsible "Babs" and "Carlo" had neglected to write to their mother was not surprising, but that she had heard nothing from Gay, in answer to her own lengthy explanation, worried her not a little. The girl must be back from Canada by this time; one would have thought she might at least have cabled.

Enid suddenly realized that with the exception of Carter's rather clumsy—and frequently typed—communications she had not received a single letter from home since her arrival in Paris. Could it be that her family had played a larger part in her life than she had supposed?

CHAPTER XV

URSULA'S cable forbidding Peter to follow her would probably have failed of its purpose had it not so nearly coincided with Charles' sudden resignation as treasurer of the Calizona Company and subsequent disappearance. Four days before the *Paris* had sailed with his wife and sister-in-law, he had vanished as completely as might have been expected had he first looted the corporation's safety vault. His accounts were found, however, to be in every way correct and his written resignation, which was submitted at the next meeting of the board of directors, was "laid on the table," pending a solution of what appeared to be a mystery.

Charles' defection threw a heavy additional burden upon Peter, who discovered to his surprise that, in spite of popular assumption to the contrary, Charles had performed his functions with notable efficiency. After all, a man cannot fill a responsible executive position for more than twenty years without acquiring peculiar experience, and even had the directors desired to find an immediate substitute, they could not readily have laid hands upon a suitable successor.

Hence, Peter was compelled to do double duty. While his first inclination had been to start immediately in pursuit of Ursula, her cable, coupled with his loyalty to the organization, was enough to keep him at home, particularly as a crisis had arisen in the Ajo strike negotiations, which required all his attention. Swamped with work at the office, he had little time to dwell upon his own affairs. He had from the first refused to take

Ursula's departure seriously. Women, he told himself, were always putting up games like that on the men they loved. This "good-bye forever" business, when nothing had occurred to disturb the relations between them, was pure nonsense. What possible reason had she for suddenly pulling up stakes and clearing out that way? None! She would realize it soon enough, even if she hadn't done so already. That was the bluff he put up to himself. Yet, underneath—he was aware that he was whistling to keep up his courage. He knew that it was not in keeping with Ursula's character to indulge in any caprice. She thought, at least, that she meant what she said. He would have to show her that she did not. A few minutes' talk face to face—.

"By George! McKay!" said Blair to him one day. "You certainly look like the wrath of the Almighty! You're doing too much! You'll have to lay off for a while!"

Peter shook his head.

"Heaven knows I'd like to!" he said. "But you can't run the office alone! That situation at Ajo is not developing favorably in my opinion. Burk and Unwin are good men, but they haven't the experience. Some one has got to sit tight on the job!"

His mouth twitched and the scar on his chin looked deeper than Blair had ever seen it. The fellow was nearly all in! Blair clapped him on the shoulder. He was fond of McKay.

"You need a complete rest for a couple of weeks. Thing for you to do is to hop on an ocean liner and take a joy ride! I can handle that Ajo bunch. If the Union thinks it's going to force the check-off on us they'll find they're damn well mistaken. You clean up your desk and order your steamer tickets, and I'll hold the fort until

you get back. I expect to go West the first of August. You can have—let's see"—he fingered his diary—"you can stay away until July twentieth. That will give you three weeks—time enough to raise a little hell in Paris. It's an order!"

Thus Peter's opportunity to follow Ursula came at last through the same source as hers to run away. Her reply forbidding him to come, in answer to his cable telling her that he was starting for Paris, had deeply wounded him. Should he send her another asking her to reconsider? Already she might have relented in view of his apparent yielding to her wishes. But even assuming that by now she felt differently, was it wise to raise the issue? Why give her a second opportunity? Peter concluded that on the whole it would be better to arrive in Paris without letting Ursula know that he was coming. Once he was there, *of course* she'd see him! Nevertheless, as the *Mauretania* coursed through the waves toward the coast of France, his confidence began to weaken. If only she weren't so determined! If those beautiful veiled eyes of hers were not so unwavering. Suppose she really meant to break with him! He refused to countenance the possibility. It was preposterous, after all that had passed between them! At worst it could only be some crazy whim—a temporary impulse that would pass. With every knot of the lessening distance Peter became more and more impatient. The image of the woman who had filled his life for the last few months completely obsessed him.

They were delayed at Cherbourg, and the debarkation of the *Mauretania's* passengers was not accomplished until nearly eight in the evening, when, in company with others equally disappointed, Peter boarded the special train, with the knowledge that he would reach Paris too

late to see Ursula that night. It was two o'clock, and the outer doors were tight shut and fastened when his taxi deposited him on the pavement before the "Mirabeau," to which he had radioed for a room. His ring was ultimately answered by a sleepy porter, who, after consulting a paper from his pocket, grudgingly admitted that Monsieur was expected, and, relieving him of his valise, conducted him to the elevator. Peter's French was of the weakest, and as the man was either too sleepy or too stupid to fathom his repeated inquiry as to whether Miss Weybridge was at the hotel, he was forced to leave his curiosity unsatisfied. Now that he was there, in the same building where she undoubtedly was sleeping, the suggestion that he would not see Ursula the first thing in the morning seemed ludicrous. Instructing the porter that he wished to be called at seven o'clock—a feat accomplished by closing his eyes, laying his cheek against his hands, and then holding up the requisite number of fingers to indicate the hour—Peter unpacked and went to bed.

He was too excited to sleep, however, and arose at the first hint of dawn, dressed, and descended to the foyer. There was nobody in sight but a scrub-man, who was sprinkling the marble floors with sawdust, and the Rue de la Paix was empty save for the street cleaners. It was too early even to take down the shutters. He walked to the Place Vendôme, down the Rue St. Honoré, then up to the Boulevard des Capucines to the Opera, and back to the hotel. A waiter who looked as if he were suffering from pernicious ænemia was now sweeping out the dining-room. Otherwise the situation was unchanged. Paris was clearly no place for early risers.

But surely Ursula, unless her habits had changed entirely, must have been up long ago! If there were only

some way to communicate with her! By sheer superiority of will he compelled the waiter, who clearly regarded doing so in the light of a favor, to serve him with coffee, and, by the aid of a few more strolls, managed to control his impatience until the concierge appeared at eight o'clock, when he learned to his chagrin that Mademoiselle Weybridge had not been a guest at the hotel for several weeks. She had gone away the last month, the concierge said, leaving no address but her bankers'. He would find Madame Kent, her sister, at the Ritz.

It was Peter's first intimation that Enid was in Paris, and his hope of immediately seeing Ursula again, which had been dashed by the man's statement, revived. If Enid were there, of course Ursula would be with her—and in all probability so would be Charles! He would catch his two birds at once!

With considerable confidence Peter crossed the street and walked the short distance to the Ritz. Yes, he was told, Madame Kent was there. Monsieur Kent? The concierge regarded him with slightly raised eyebrows. Most assuredly not! he declared. Peter failed to understand. Was Miss Weybridge, Madame Kent's sister, staying there? he asked. No, there was no Miss Weybridge at the hotel. Madame Kent was occupying a suite with Madame Allyn. Could anything further be done for Monsieur? The concierge solved the problem in Peter's mind by suggesting that it was hardly likely that Madame Kent was as yet awake. So Peter took back his card and crossed the square to Morgan, Harjes & Company. If he could not locate Ursula through her bankers he would go back later to the Ritz and get her address from Enid, making inquiry regarding Charles' whereabouts at the same time. He had hardly placed his foot upon the curb before a taxi drew up and Charles him-

self got out. They caught sight of one another simultaneously.

"Hello, old man!" exclaimed Charles, who struck Peter as looking unusually spick and span. "What the devil are you doing over here?"

"Just looking around a bit. I suppose it would be quite in order for me to ask you the same thing."

"Well, I'm just looking around a bit, too. When did you leave America?"

"Last Monday on the *Mauretania*. This is certainly a surprise! I never expected to run into you, but I'm glad I have. How is Mrs. Kent?"

"I really don't know," answered Charles enigmatically. "She looked quite well the last time I saw her a couple of weeks ago. What's the matter with you? Don't you read the papers?"

"I haven't for nearly a week. Has anything happened——?"

Peter perceived that there was some occult connection between his friend's question and the concierge's eyebrows.

"Enid and I are getting a divorce," said Charles. "There happened to be a good deal of publicity about it last week. It was all over the front page of the *Herald*. Thought you might have seen it."

He spoke without embarrassment, seemed on the whole rather cheerful than otherwise about it, Peter thought.

"I didn't. I'm sorry to hear it!" he said. Then as the light dawned upon his recollection and he recalled the scene between Enid and Carter Blair upon the point, the evening he had first met Ursula, he challenged Charles suddenly:

"I say! Has this anything to do with the way you re-

signed? You didn't treat us with much ceremony, you know."

Charles acknowledged his dereliction with a wry smile.

"I don't suppose I did. However, that's a matter I'd rather not discuss. I've resigned—that's all there is to it!" Then, as if thinking his words might sound a trifle brusque, he added: "I was sorry to have to. There didn't seem any other way out of it, and I guess there wasn't. Anyhow, things are not so bad as they might have been. Old Pepperill was awfully decent about the whole thing, and had a talk with the children, and they're going to stick by me. We didn't tell them about it at first, but when the thing broke I cabled."

He laid his hand on Peter's shoulder.

"I don't want to talk any more about it, old chap. I'll only say this, that I was caught in a jam—and my wife took advantage of it. You remember that day we went down to the farm to see Sheridan? Well, I told you my side of it then. Appearances were against me, that's all. You can disbelieve anything you may hear to the contrary. Where are you staying?"

Peter told him. He was distressed to hear of his friend's marital troubles, but not altogether surprised. They interested him less, however, than what he might hear about Ursula. But he must not permit Charles to suspect the real purpose of his trip to Paris.

"Anyhow, your leaving the company is the indirect cause of my having a vacation," he said, explaining the number of additional duties he had been obliged to assume, adding casually as they entered the bank: "And how is your sister-in-law?"

"Fine!" replied Charles. "She's just been over to London with me for a few days. We only got back last evening. You'll find her at the France et Choiseul, if

you want to look her up. She'd be glad to see you, I'm sure."

"She's not staying with Mrs. Kent, then?"

"No."

Peter did not follow up his question, for the tone of Charles' reply was enough to convince him that whatever might be the specific reason why the two sisters were not together, it had something to do with the divorce.

Peter waited while Charles cashed his letter of credit, and then, having left his address at the mail desk, walked back to the taxi with him. He was anxious to reach Ursula as soon as possible. Luckily, she would probably be tired after her journey, and hence in no hurry to go out early. Inventing an appointment, he promised to dine with Charles that evening, and then hurried to the France et Choiseul, where he was informed to his relief that Mademoiselle Weybridge was in. Scribbling a line on the back of his card to the effect that he had just come off the steamer and must see her at once, Peter surrendered it to the concierge and sat down in the dingy foyer to wait. At last—after seven long weeks—he was to see her again! It now seemed an incredible separation. Had she minded it as much as he? How was she looking? Would she receive him in her sitting-room, he wondered? Or would she come down-stairs,—in order, if she were still in that absurd frame of mind, to have him at a disadvantage? Silly girl! It would be good to see her once more! He hoped she would ask him up-stairs! Already he could feel his arms about her, his lips upon hers.

He was kept waiting but a few minutes. Ursula was always prompt, and Peter, who could see the chasseur coming down the stairs, picked up his hat and stick and went to meet him. Then his air-castles came clattering

to the pavement—the very dingy pavement of the France et Choiseul.

Mademoiselle Weybridge begged to be excused.

She did mean it then! Until that moment Peter had never frankly faced the possibility that Ursula intended her declaration to be taken at its actual face value. How could he, knowing how she had loved him? No true lover would have accepted such a decision as final! She had drawn a dead-line and he had crossed it at his own peril—like the Wabbly he had shot at the time of the "Old Glory" strike out at Oxide!

He tipped the concierge and walked out to the street. He could not believe that she had refused to receive him after he had come three thousand miles to see her! Was that all he meant to her? Humiliation merged in resentment. That was no way to treat a friend! She at least owed him the courtesy of an interview! Any man ought to have his day in court. But she had closed the door in his face without a hearing—as if he were a bill collector or a book-agent. You wouldn't treat a debtor that way—let alone a creditor! She had been the pursuer—anyhow, at the beginning. She had got him into it in spite of his efforts to steer clear. And now she was calmly dumping him without so much as a "good-bye"! So that was what was meant by all being fair in love! It was plain that she was tired of him—had found something better, maybe! Peter began to be angry. He would not be slighted and rebuffed that way! He would have it out with her if he had to camp in the foyer of the France et Choiseul for the next five days!

The more he thought of it the more incredible it all seemed. Half-way up the Champs Elysées he stopped short in his tracks. Perhaps he had misunderstood the meaning of her message! "Begged to be excused" did

not necessarily mean that she refused to see him. She might have been dressing or in the middle of breakfast. Or the concierge might have misconstrued her words. How foolish of him not to have sent up another note asking her to fix a time when he might call. It was even now only half after ten. Under the stimulus of this false hope he turned and almost ran back to the France et Choiseul. Was Mademoiselle Weybridge still in, he inquired breathlessly? No, Mademoiselle had just gone out. The concierge had no idea when she would return, but he produced a sheet of paper and an envelope and indicated the whereabouts of pen and ink, promising to deliver a letter to Mademoiselle personally as soon as she came in.

Peter, discouraged, returned to his room at the Mirabeau, and threw himself upon his bed to await her answer. He had had but four hours' sleep following his exhausting experience upon the lighter at Cherbourg and an equally fatiguing trip to Paris, and he was very tired. When he awoke it was nearly five o'clock. He now acknowledged to himself that he knew all along that there had been no mistake. If Ursula had intended to see him at all she would have sent some explanatory reply to his first card. No, he must find some other approach to her —through Charles, perhaps.

It was not really necessary for him to ask at the desk if any letter had come for him. He knew that there had not. Well, he would make one more effort to see her before going to dine with Charles. Perhaps he would find her at tea. If not, and she should happen to be out, he would leave some flowers for her. The concierge at the France et Choiseul was not the same one who had been there in the morning. He was even doubtful as to whether there was any such person as Mademoiselle Weybridge

stopping at the hotel. There had been, he admitted, but he was not sure that she was still there. Peter, holding his bouquet, assured him that she was. The concierge shrugged, retired behind a glass partition, and examined a book while Peter waited impatiently for several minutes. Then he returned with the information that Mademoiselle had departed that very day, before noon, having given up her room and leaving no forwarding address.

"*Voilà!*" he said, pointing triumphantly to a key hanging from one of the pigeon-holes behind him. "There is even a letter which came after she had gone—and we do not know what to do with it."

At dinner all the gaiety was supplied by Charles, who in spite of his marital fiasco appeared in fairly high spirits and before the end of the meal waxed more confidential than Peter had ever known him. His trip to London appeared to have set him up wonderfully, and, besides accomplishing the object of his visit, he confessed to having seized the opportunity to enlarge his wardrobe. He had not, he said, been in England since 1917, and while it was changed in some respects, he had found the people very much the same. What he saw of the polo highly encouraged him as to America's chances. The men knew how to play, but their mounts were vastly inferior to those at home—a question of money, probably. He had met a lot of old friends and really enjoyed himself, quite like old times.

Peter, who was in no mood for talking, let him ramble on. He was getting a vacation out of it, anyhow, Charles said, and he hadn't had anything worthy of the name for fifteen years. Enid had gone abroad occasionally, of course, but it had cost so much to run "The Mews" that he never had felt that he could afford to go, himself.

And then, of course, there had always been the children. Somebody had to stay with them.

"You may think it queer of me, Peter!" he conceded finally, "but now that Enid has started this thing I can't say—knowing all I do—that I'm sorry. It came as a terrible wallop, naturally—the way she did it. I was bowled absolutely over. That's why I acted as I did about the Calizona. I wanted to get out—disappear—never see any of my friends again! But when I once got clear of that woman—had a chance to think things over quietly—see what a sucker she'd played me for—why, I began to be glad. Something told me that a woman as crooked as that would never be able to turn my children against me. I thought they loved me; I didn't believe they loved her. I knew Gay didn't, anyhow! You've never seen her, have you? When Pepperill cabled he'd seen all of them and they were going to stick, I tell you I was proud as Punch. I don't know what the old codger told 'em, but, 'Charlie, old horse,' I said to myself, 'you may be a failure in some things, but, by gad, if your children like you that much you must have something in you!'"

He waved aside a proffered wine card.

"This being on the wagon is a bit awkward over here, of course, but I haven't fallen off yet and I'm not going to. I must say I came near it the first few days after Enid pulled this divorce business on me."

He looked better and more fit than at any time since their acquaintance. It was as if some staggering load had been lifted from his shoulders.

"By the way," he added as they got up, "you were asking after Ursula. I don't believe you'll have a chance to see her, after all. I found a note from her at my hotel just now saying that she was going away for a few

weeks. She didn't say where. There's a grand girl, Peter! I wish I'd married her instead of Enid! I never saw her look so lovely as she did when she was in London with me last week. They all went simply wild over her. It's the mystery of the age to me why that woman has never married. She could have Brookfield by lifting her finger, but for some reason she doesn't see it that way. There was one English Johnny I pretty near had to throw off the train to keep him from following her here."

So! Peter hid his expression by lighting a cigarette at the neighboring candle.

"I'm sorry I shan't see her again. It's too bad she has gone away. She must have done a lot toward keeping you cheered up."

"I'll say she did!" agreed Charles heartily. "I don't know what I should have done without her. However, now you're here I hope you'll do the same. God knows there's plenty going on here, especially if a man's a bachelor."

"How long must you stay?"

"Why I'm practically through now. A couple of days more and it'll all be over. Enid and I have got to be 'reconciled.' Isn't that a joke?"

"Reconciled!"

"Sure, dear boy! We have to go before some bally old judge who asks us if we don't think we can go on living together. We naturally say we can't—that nothing would induce us to—and that's the end of it."

"Is that all any one has to do?" Peter's knowledge of divorce was limited to casual visits on "Ladies' Day" to the county court of Oxide.

"Practically! It's an opera bouffe affair. Anyhow, that's how it strikes me. A lawyer might feel differently about it. Enid and I are supposed to be expatriated

Americans living in Paris on the Rue de l'Odéon—that is, we were living there until I deserted her for somebody else. Theoretically she's living there still, although she's never spent a night in the place. As for me, I've not laid eyes on it. She actually lives at the Ritz; I live at the Continental, actually, but my 'actual domicile,' according to French law, is some place on the Rue des Catalans, wherever that is!"

"I should think you'd get mixed up if you tried to go home on a dark night," said Peter. "'When is a domicile not a domicile?'"

"That's easy," answered Charles. "'When it's actual'!"

Peter's was a poor simulation of light-heartedness.

"What's the matter with you?" chaffed Charles as they left Voisin's and walked toward the opera, looking for a taxi. "Anybody would think it was you who was getting divorced—not me! Paris is no place to have a grouch."

"I've no grouch!" retorted Peter. "A bit seedy, maybe—I had practically no sleep last night—but I don't expect any here. Come along! Show me Montmartre!"

They "bummed" from one dance-hall to another most of the night, and although they ordered champagne in each place and even paid for a few fox-trots with some of the heavily made-up cocottes who sat expectantly along the front tables, Peter was unable to throw off the depression which had settled upon him like the chill from an ice-field. Even the champagne did not encourage him, and he replied only in monosyllables to Charles' banter and his youthful partner's attempts at conversation. He was like a fatally wounded man still struggling along, while conscious that he is done for. For he *was* done for.

No woman who still loved a man, he told himself, would refuse to see him after he had come three thousand miles to plead his cause. That he had deliberately done so, in spite of her warning that it would be a useless errand, would make no difference to her—ought, in fact, to render her all the more likely to receive him. The denial of a mere interview to a man who had crossed the ocean was inhuman. It meant that she did not want to see him, and if she did not want to see him she naturally did not love him. No, she had chucked him—like the English Johnny—like Brookfield, very likely. Perhaps she was used to doing that very thing—a sort of Long Island variety of "*l'Atlantide*," who, instead of murdering her lovers when she was tired of them, made a graceful get-away instead! An easy method! Yes, why marry?

CHAPTER XVI

ENID'S nerve slumped rapidly during the ten days following the public revelation of her private affairs in the *Herald*, and she might even have defaulted or adjourned "*le conciliation*," had it not been for Teeny, who was resolved that for the sake of liberty, if not for purity, the first case under the new rule must not be allowed "to flop." The integrity of Franco-American divorce must and should be preserved! So she slapped Enid on the back, bolstered her courage with a shot of *fine champagne*, thrust her into a taxi and delivered her, ivory-white and apprehensive, to M. Joignot, who, in an aura of *Suivez moi jeune homme*, was waiting for them in the corridor of the Palais de Justice.

Across the hall she could see Charles and that Mr. McKay who had dined with her the night of Ursula's birthday party. Her husband, who was dressed with unusual care, seemed to be taking the affair rather easily. The two groups, while remaining within earshot of the door to the judge's chambers, manœuvred so as to keep as far away from each other as possible, but Enid decided that McKay was distinctly good-looking. She liked the alert determination of his dark, intent face. Decision, she told herself, was to men what beauty was to women.

"Monsieur et Madame Charles Kent!"

Enid took a firm grip on herself. The door of the anteroom smothered the noise outside, and the attendant led them in and seated them side by side like naughty children in the two chairs before the judge. Charles had not looked at her. What did his ominous silence mean?

Why did Charles somehow seem so much larger—more impressive? Was he going to turn and rend her, now that she had got him there? What was the matter with the judge? Why was he hesitating so long? The sickly sweet air with a whiff of rubber in it made her head swim.

The judge, who, apparently unmindful of their presence, had been sorting papers, absent-mindedly lifted his head.

"Kent?" he said, in an inquiring tone, pronouncing it "Kong." Hearing no denial, he ran rapidly over the dossier in his hand.

"You are M. Charles Kent," he asked in French of Charles, "the defendant?"

"Yes," said Charles.

"You are Madame Kent, the plaintiff?"

"*Oui, m'sieur,*" said Enid.

The judge removed another paper from the sheaf and examined it with some care.

"I see that full arrangements have been made for the maintenance of the children, and that Madame Kent has means of her own. That is well. It is most important that children should not become public wards."

The judge looked at Enid directly for the first time. He was an anxious little man who gave the impression of being in a hurry to get through with his official duties and home to *déjeuner*, provided he could do so without criticism.

"Madame Kent," he said, "are you sure it is quite impossible for you to go on living with your husband? Is there nothing that can be done by either of you to readjust your differences?"

Enid tried to speak, but her throat had become suddenly dry. She was filled with an overpowering sense of the significance of the word she was about to utter.

"Well, Madame?"

"*Non,*" she answered in a low voice.

The judge seemed much relieved. Turning to Charles he said:

"Monsieur Kent, do you not think that your differences with Madame Kent could be reconciled?"

"*Non!*" replied Charles, in a voice so firm and loud that it seemed to Enid like a huge, tolling bell. "*Absolutement!*" he added in the same tone.

Bells! Everything Enid had done seemed associated curiously with bells. "*Non–non!–Non–non!*" Where had she heard them first? Again there came to her those sharp, quick strokes from *The Astarte's* forward deck that evening in Newport Harbor. "No–no! No–no! No–no! Thou shalt not!"

The face of the rusty little judge assumed an expression of professional regret.

"It is unfortunate," he murmured. "*Mais, c'est tout!*"

The attendant arose and placed a hand upon the back of each chair. The judge bowed. She and Charles arose and bowed, and Enid followed the man who was the father of her children and had been her husband for twenty years, out of the door into the confusion of the corridor. "*Non–non!*" Two-score of beady eyes watched her cynically as she pushed her way through the crowd. She knew that they were all telling one another that that was one of those American women who had come over there to evade their own laws. Joignot was awaiting her behind a pillar—like a legal Mephistoph.

"*Très facile, n'est-ce pas, Madame?*"

She did not reply. She felt a strange resentment toward this foreigner. Why didn't Charles look at her? He might at least recognize her existence! After all, she had acted more than considerately toward him! There

was no reason why he should not be a little decent about it. Ah! He was turning toward her. She tried to smile, but it went dead. His face was very stern and cold.

"Enid," he said in a level voice, "you are a bad woman!"

They were the last words he ever spoke to her.

CHAPTER XVII

PETER, during the return voyage, developed a totally unexpected strain of irresponsibility that astonished and amused Charles, who found it hard to believe that this rather dashing person who frequented the smoking-room at such strange hours and bid in the auction pools at such preposterous figures could be his former serious-minded superior at the Calizona. The fellow seemed to be having a sort of second blooming—the germ of which he had picked up in Paris and which was only now breaking out.

"For the love of Mike!" he would growl, raising himself on his elbow and shading his eyes from the light as Peter entered their stateroom at 2 A. M. "Why do you go to bed at all? Who have you been sitting up with this time? The pearl-festooned widow from Omaha or the blue-eyed baby blonde from Montreal?"

"Both," answered Peter carelessly, as he undressed. "I began with the widow and, after she went to bed, I took on the infant you speak of. I like her. She's a convent girl—there's a whole bunch of them, on their way back from Rome—'pellegrini,' you know."

Charles snorted.

"A convent girl, is she? She acts it! I saw her toss down three cocktails at the bar last night before dinner! 'Pellegrini!' She looks to me more as if she came out of the 'Follies.' Peter! You're certainly degenerating! You don't want to be known as a baby-snatcher, do you?"

"I wouldn't mind if I snatched the right baby!"

He tossed his shoes outside.

"Well," said Charles, "there are plenty of 'em on the boat. I never saw so many flappers in my life. If they only wouldn't make up so they might be pretty."

"I think they're pretty, anyway!" declared Peter. "There's a lot of rot talked about these modern kids that's not true. People judge 'em by their skirts and their lipsticks! You might just as fairly have judged the morality of a woman in the old days by the size of her waist or how many rats she put in her hair. They're not a bit wilder than their mothers were. Give me one of the present generation every time!"

"Well, it looks as if you were on your way to get one!" Charles turned his face to the wall. "Who was that skippy thing you had in the smoking-room yesterday afternoon? Another nun, maybe?"

"That's a little girl who's been over to London studying for the stage. She comes of an old Virginia family. She's a friend of Bernard Shaw's."

"I know—one of the F. F. V.'s. Peter, you're a simp! I hope the poor little thing didn't study too hard! I bet she thinks Bernard Shaw is a prizefighter."

Peter hurled a novel at the wall above his friend's head.

"Trouble with you, old dear, you're jealous! I'm going to have the best time I can on this floating joy-palace! You may have forgotten that I'm off on a vacation. Any little cutey that wants to mother me shall have her chance! I'm free and unbiassed and open to any sort of reasonable proposition."

"Well, don't get caught!" grumbled Charles, as Peter climbed into the upper berth and snapped off the light.

"Is there any reason why I shouldn't get married?" called down the newly fledged man-about-town. "I'm above the age of consent. Do you expect me to remain a bachelor all my life?"

"I expect you to marry something better than one of the bunch of candy kids on this boat. I should say they were pretty cheap, and that you could kiss any one of 'em two minutes after you met her!" opined Charles.

Peter indulged in a luxurious yawn.

"Maybe you're right!" he assented comfortably. "I'll admit that's been my experience so far. But there may be something really sweet and refined that I've overlooked. Anyhow, I'll introduce you first before I commit myself."

But he did not introduce anything of the sort to Charles, and they docked without Peter's having mortgaged his future to either maid of fifteen or widow of fifty.

They parted on Pier Fifty-seven—Charles for "The Mews," Peter for the offices of the Calizona, where he discovered, a little to his chagrin, that, as Carter Blair put it, they had somehow managed to wiggle along without him, in spite of the inexperience of Messrs. Burk and Unwin. Blair was anxious to pull out for the West at the earliest possible moment, in order to have plenty of time not only to go through the company's mining-camps but to pick out a suitable domicile. Enid's idea of reacquiring a legal residence, so that he could run for the United States Senate sometime, had struck him as a good one—worthy of that clever brain of hers, which he so much appreciated.

He had formerly lived at Bisbee and had owned a house there which he had sold after his divorce, but he had decided that as a political candidate it would be better for him to register from Oxide, which was almost a city and boasted twenty-one churches and forty-seven cafeterias. He had no intention of permanently residing in the West, of course,—except for the month

or so every year rendered necessary by the demands of his business. Their real home would be in an apartment-house on upper Fifth Avenue, but their political domicile would be in Oxide. He wanted a suitable house—one in keeping with his dignity as president of the Calizona, as well as the glory of his future office as United States Senator. All of which he innocently confided to Peter over a large cigar of excellent quality.

"It's all right—when you're a young fellow just making your way—to take a woman out to the desert, but later on it doesn't do, particularly if she's ever known anything better." He did not mention any names, assuming quite properly that Peter was informed of the situation, but delivered himself with a bluff simplicity that bespoke no self-consciousness. Peter had always liked him and still continued to do so. If he was honestly in love with Enid Kent, his subordinate felt that to be no concern of his. The only point was about Charles.

"I notice Kent came back on the same steamer with you," commented Blair. "I'm sorry for him, but damn if I can see how there'd be room for both of us in the same office! I don't really understand why he should take this thing so hard though! People fall in love and fall out of it—and that's all there is to it!"

"Quite so!" agreed Peter. It was true that he could not imagine Charles and Blair working in the same suite of offices. For the present he would let things take their own course. After Blair had gone West, he might have an opportunity at some meeting of the board of directors to take up the possibility of finding a place for Charles at Ajo or Oxide or Bisbee. He had shown his value, and there was plenty for him to do. He could live on horseback out there and would, no doubt, enjoy the life.

On the same day that Blair left for Chicago on the

Twentieth Century Limited, Reuter's Agency cabled from London that the final arrangements for the visit of the Prince of Wales to the United States had been completed, and that as such he would attend the international polo games, having accepted the invitation of Mr. and Mrs. James Abercrombie Burden, who had offered to place their Long Island residence at his disposal. "The entire management of this part of the Prince's visit," the announcement continued, "will be left in the hands of Mr. Charles Cotesworth Kent, formerly president of the International Polo Association."

"There won't be anything particular for me to do except hang around, I guess," Charles told Peter. "He'll have his own suite, of course. But somebody from our outfit has got to be more or less on the job to see that things are going all right. I'll just be a sort of messenger-boy, I expect. But naturally I'll have a chance to see something of him. After all, I knew his grandfather fairly well.—Yes, that was what I had to go over to London about—the time I took Ursula along with me."

He did not tell Peter that his original letter from General Trotter had contained an intimation that should Mr. Kent, in view of his old acquaintance with the royal family, care to extend the hospitality of his house to His Royal Highness during polo week, a suggestion to that effect would be favorably entertained.

CHAPTER XVIII

URSULA's flight from Paris had been due to her realization that only by making it physically impossible to do so, could she refrain from seeing Peter. His failure to advise her in advance of his arrival had had precisely the opposite effect to that intended. His purpose had been to prevent her from forbidding him to come and from reiterating, and hence strengthening, her determination not to see him, should he disobey her wishes. If, on the contrary, after yielding in the first instance, he had in fact cabled her later on that he was coming, it is doubtful whether she could have brought herself to deny him an interview, for during the entire interval between his sailing from America and his arrival in Paris her imagination would have operated to undermine her resolution. Once she was sure of his presence in the same city, perhaps in the same street as herself, it would have been impossible for her to refuse to see him. It would have seemed too cruel after he had come all that distance, and her heart would have furnished a thousand excuses, if not reasons why she should.

As it was, nothing had occurred to weaken her original purpose. She had conquered her temptation upon receipt of his original cable, and had forbidden him to follow her. He had not replied—and he had not come. Time had satisfied her of the wisdom of her course. Gradually she had sought out her old friends and interested herself in sight-seeing. She had found in Charles a sympathetic companion and, when he had suggested that she accompany him to London, had gladly accepted his invitation.

Her ten days there had done much to divert her mind from her own affairs, and she had returned to the France et Choiseul with no suspicion that Peter had arrived in Paris at almost the precise moment as herself. The announcement, brought while she was breakfasting in bed, that he was down-stairs asking to see her, had come out of a clear sky. There had been no time for her mind to paint a pathetic, lonely Peter hungering for her love, no chance to argue with herself over whether she should see him or not. Fatigued as she was by the Channel crossing, the news startled and disconcerted her, and she automatically reacted according to her preconceived programme. Had she not cabled him not to come, warned him that she would refuse to see him even if he came, and had he not disregarded her wishes? The whole purpose of her sacrifice would be thrown away should she now yield. Thus, with hardly an instant's hesitation she had sent back word that she must be excused. Then she had slumped! The struggle with herself had gone on for over an hour. At one moment she was convinced that she had done the only possible thing; at the next she felt her refusal to be unkind and unnecessary. Yet all the while she was perfectly well aware that if she once looked into his eyes of bitten blue, heard the friendly drawl of his voice, saw his tired smile curving into the white scar above his chin, and the patient hunch of his uneven shoulders, everything would be over. So during a temporary phase, in which reason had got the better of emotion, she had hastily packed her steamer trunk and fled, leaving only a brief note for Charles explaining that she had gone to Switzerland, but without giving her address. She had, in truth, no address to give.

As the express whirled her through the flat, simmering country, it seemed fantastic that she should be fleeing

from Peter; still more fantastic when she unfastened her blinds at sunrise next morning and looked across the upland, sheltering the tiny Hotel Steinbok, to the wall of mountain peaks beyond.

The earth was still dark, the sky streaming with stars, but here and there a window gleamed upon the nearer hillsides, and the cold breath from the snowfields was faintly sweet with hay and bore the occasional tinkle of a cow-bell. Unexpectedly the zenith paled. A jagged line of white appeared above the eastern rampart, turning first rose, then gold, and, finally, bursting into flame, leaped across and kindled the crests upon the opposite side. The upland swam in a mysterious sheen where the eye refused to focus; then slowly resolved itself into the proper perspective of meadow, forest, and glistening summit. The whole valley filled, like a bowl to the brim, with dazzling light; the air turned warm, and the world became alive. A drowsy jangling bespoke the awakening herd; from the chalet above the hotel came a woman's voice raised in song; and a fly on the sash, revived by the sun, began to buzz once more.

How beautiful, yet how different from that morning when, only three months before, she had leaned from her window at "Folly Farm" and realized the ineptitude and incompleteness of her life! How different the world of her own spirit! She had felt then only a vague yearning; now, as she gazed upon the landscape before her, she suffered from a pain as acute as if her heart were being torn from her breast. Yet her very agony seemed to enhance the beauty 'round about her. Would she now, if it were again the morning of her birthday and she were given her choice, live it all over again, or not? The alternative presented no question to her mind. She would gladly suffer anything—even death—rather than lose the

memory of her life with Peter. The spiritual altitude from which she now regarded life was as far above her former one as this Alpine world was above the level of Long Island.

Before she had met Peter her life had been flat, monotonous, safe,—a dusty plain where she had thirsted for the cool waters she knew were somewhere running among fern-covered banks beyond her sight; since then she had been climbing through sinister ravines along dangerous precipices, above roaring glacial torrents, where, though a misstep might plunge her into the abyss, she breathed the free air of hidden Alpine valleys and knew the ecstasy of achieving the highest passes of human experience. What though she had been forced to leave him and go on alone? She could no more lose the precious memories of both her happiness and her sorrow than the glory of this dawn, the beauty of which would enrich her life forever.

Wonderful as the dawn had been, the realization that her life would henceforth consist of beautiful memories did not give her quite the satisfaction it would have, had her bell been answered and had she not been forced, after an interminable period of waiting, to go down-stairs for her breakfast. The dining-room was crowded with pallid, thick-lensed *Professoren* from Geneva, Basel, and Friedberg, their dumpy wives and long-legged children, all absorbed in acquiring the proper number of calories. The clatter and hubbub nearly deafened Ursula as she stood waiting until the single *Dienstmädchen* should find a place for her, and when she was eventually given a seat, the splotches upon the table-cloth and the lukewarm coffee served to efface her recollection of the sunrise.

She had bought her ticket to Übergrünwald because she had always heard of the romantic character of its environ-

ment, but she now began to appreciate that one cannot live by scenery alone. The Steinbok was one of those proprietary hostelries frequented year after year by the same families, who preëmpted the best bedrooms, exercised suzerainty over the domestics, and discouraged the presence of other visitors. Ursula's room was small and stuffy; there seemed to be no place down-stairs where she could have the privilege of sitting without being the object of hostile scrutiny, while the reading and writing-rooms swarmed with beefy men in white shirts flaring wide at the neck and purple-faced women smeared with cold-cream.

Ursula, at first amused by the sight of elderly members of the *Landwehr* going around with bare knees and stout ladies garbed like Maid Marian, found that they got quickly on her nerves. So did the white metallic hardness of the roads, which hurt her feet and powdered her with fine dust; so did the blazing incandescence of the sun that blistered her skin and dazzled her eyes. She shrank from going into the heat and noise of the hotel dining-room, and sought instead a small *Gasthaus* on one of the neighboring hillsides, where she could get *Zwieback*, *Erdbeeren*, and milk before the afternoon rush from the Steinbok began.

Deprived of all companionship, Ursula experienced the loneliness of a prisoner paroled without friends or occupation in a foreign country. By the end of a single week the beauties of Übergrünwald had faded as completely as the opalescence of her first sunrise. The world appeared to be filled with closely cropped, red-necked Nordics who viewed her presence as an unwarranted intrusion upon their privacy, and who aroused in her latent antagonisms of which she had theretofore been totally unconscious. They were all elbows, so manifestly out for

what they could get—from veal cutlets to afterglow. The ordinarily sweet-tempered Ursula found herself an involuntary participant in a fierce struggle for survival, in which she was helpless. Never had she so felt the need of some one qualified to battle for her against these rabid individualists.

In the solitude of the remote valleys, where she sought refuge amid towering walls of rock, she was overwhelmed by the sense of her own insignificance. Lying amid the bluebells, staring up through the pines and larches into the blue above, the concerns of the race to which she belonged seemed of no importance. What difference could it make what she did, either to the monads contending amongst themselves down at the Steinbok or to this vast inscrutable universe? Why should she seek to oppose its laws and currents? Was she so fatuous as to imagine that she could improve upon it? Could it possibly make any difference to God or man whether she had Peter or didn't have him? Was he not old enough to know what he was about? Could one person assume to decide for another? Did not that other have the absolute right to decide for himself? That had been her original thesis, on which she had acted. She had had the right to give herself to Peter if she wanted to. They had been so happy! And now he was wandering about Paris, while she was eating her heart out among the mountains. A few years—and they would both be forgotten. Suppose it were some other woman who was sitting there, looking across the green slopes at that giant amphitheatre of peaks? Would she feel justified in telling her that she was wise in sacrificing herself, wise to go on sitting there? On the contrary, wouldn't she call her a goose for not sending for her lover?

There were times, particularly when surrounded by

the singularly unattractive guests at the Hotel Steinbok, when she was only prevented from telegraphing Peter to come to her by the fact that she did not know where he was. And underneath everything was a faint hope that in some unexpected way Peter might track her down and come to her of his own accord. In that case she realized that she would give up the fight. Then a belated copy of the *Herald* informed her that both Charles and Peter had sailed for America, and all hope died. He had gone—for good! Everything was settled. At least, there was nothing more to worry about. And for a short time a certain relief came to her from that. There was no longer any reason for her hiding among the Nordics, but neither was there anything to take her back to Paris. She could no longer abide Übergrünwald, and, reading that the Kaynes and others of her friends were at the Lido, she took the Simplon-Orient Express for Venice, arriving there at about the same time that Peter landed in New York.

CHAPTER XIX

It was in his capacity of the world's greatest cynic that Peter accepted Charles' invitation to stay for a fortnight at "The Mews" instead of returning to his rooms at the Croyon. The Baptist had died in Paris, and he had returned to New York, as he supposed, a ruthless buccaneer. He perceived now that he had held an entirely mistaken view of life and of human nature. However people might talk—"people" in this case being Ursula—in the end they always acted for their own interests. He was several decades behind the times—the only original "boob." The wise man was one who took what he could get—without moral qualms. Why, even the silly children on the steamer had imbibed that knowledge with their sterilized milk. So-called ideals were only window dressings. *Sauve qui peut.*

He startled his associates, who had not had the privilege of making this momentous discovery from personal experience, by giving them to understand that, like the jolly cowboy who had been to France, there was nothing he didn't know. In fact, his juvenile successes on the voyage had led him to incline to that belief himself. He wondered now at his ancient scruples. Under these circumstances his responsibilities as acting chief executive in Blair's absence served as an almost necessary safety-valve.

He was, moreover, conscious of a terrible emptiness in his life. Something vivid, warm, pulsating, had gone out of it. The current of love that had flowed from his heart to Ursula's and back again, stimulating and idealizing

his whole existence, had been short-circuited. Yet the same heart was still in his breast—a heart now taught to love, and hence craving an object. It was as if some physical process of his nature had been suddenly arrested.

It is the utter and reckless lavishment of one's affection upon another human being that is the sublime joy of love. It depends in not the slightest degree upon the worthiness or attractiveness of its object. The essence of the transfiguration wrought by being in love is in loving, not in being loved. This is a fundamental natural law. It is useless ever to tell a woman that the man she loves is unworthy of her, since his very unworthiness—his limitations, his faults, even his vices—being, in the aggregate, "him"—are what she loves. It is true that he must return her love, but, primarily, to love is what she wants and from which she derives her supreme happiness. So it is with a man, although perhaps in a lesser degree. He is far more selective than woman, seeking for a perfection which he usually finds only because love has blinded him. Women are said to be the world's greatest realists, because they love with their eyes open, and love for the mere sake of loving—about which there can be no mistake. But man, too, once he has found an object which he considers worthy of his affections, forgets the latent, after discovered, defects in his beloved, in the satisfaction of loving her. It is happiness, not love, that changes people; but it is love that makes them happy. It is more accurate to say "Love and you will be happy" than "Be good and you will be happy"—although perhaps it is much the same thing. This is part of the inherited knowledge of the race, and is a provision of nature for its perpetuation just as vital as the mere sensual urge. The lover who loses his beloved is a man out of his job. What is sometimes called "marrying on

the rebound" is generally less the result of pique or anger than the necessity of having some one upon whom to squander the love which has been deprived of its object.

It was quite a different Peter in many respects who dropped off the five o'clock express at Glen Cove, from the one two months before at "Folly Farm"—another chap entirely from the diffident young mining engineer who had attended his first dinner-party at "The Mews." Hampered by his heavy kit-bag, he had lost Charles in the crowd, but he surveyed the line of waiting motors confidently, unembarrassed at the sight of so many strangers or by the interchange of familiar greetings in which he could not share. Give him half a chance, he knew—! Charles met him on the other side of the depot.

"Looks as if Gay had forgotten us!" he said, wiping his forehead, as the cars roared off one after another, leaving them standing beside their bags in the slowly settling dust-cloud. "Anyhow, there's a taxi!" He was leading the way to it when a raucous scream echoed from the highway, and a small gray roadster whirled into the open space and stopped precisely in front of them. The yellow blur on the driver's seat resolved itself into a young girl.

"Sorry to be late, dad! But the gates held me up at the crossing."

"This is Mr. McKay," said Charles. 'This is Gay."

She shook hands with a quick, decided clasp.

"Howd'y!" she nodded. "Stick your bag in the rumble and hop in. I left a small circus at the house. They were yammering for cocktails when I left."

Peter regarded her with amazement. Had it not been impossible he would have taken her at first glance for Ursula. The same provocative features, short determined nose, and full lips. The same husky voice; the same wide,

frank smile; the same lowering black-brown eyes. What business had any woman to look so like another! He was abashed at the momentary trick his eyes had played him; then charmed by her engaging appearance as he took in the smart orange leather tunic and the chic helmet of straw that crowded the tawny hair into a flying circle about the arrogant young face, full of impatient vitality. Smaller than Ursula, he concluded, as he climbed in beside her, redder lips, with the cleaner intaglio of youth—harder, so to speak—and very modern—oh, yes, excessively modern! You couldn't teach this kid much, he guessed—if anything!

"All set!—Let her go!" called Charles from the rumble, and with a sideways flash at her passenger the modern girl let in her clutch, and, seizing an unscrupulous advantage of a neighboring chauffeur's vacillation, forced an opening in the line of motors, weaving her way carelessly in and out of the dust-hung mêlée and narrowly missing a delivery truck that thundered across their path at the first cross-roads. The car swerved, throwing him against her, and he felt the muscles of her arm as she dragged the emergency toward her.

"That was a narrow shave!" ejaculated Peter, readjusting his hat. "Do you do everything that way?" "I take a chance occasionally—if that's what you mean," she replied, darting ahead again. "Or do you refer to putting on the brakes?"

"They're not entirely inconsistent!" he suggested.

"I like to get as many emotions as I can," she conceded, "even if I smash a mud-guard occasionally."

"Have you smashed many?"

"Quite a lot, but not beyond repair. They can still keep off the mud."

"I wonder!" he mused. "Is there much around here?"

"Heaps. Everybody gets spattered occasionally. You'll have to look out for yourself."

"And why?" he demanded.

"Something tells me that you're a young man of untarnished virtue. You'll find me an excellent chaperon. By the way, dad!" she shouted over her shoulder, "Bob Morgan is at the house. He turned up about four o'clock and refused to go away. Declares he's staying to dinner under a blanket invitation extended to him at the time of the World's Fair. He's been making love to me for over an hour!"

She glanced at Peter as if to say that he would be doing the same thing then and there if he weren't a dummy.

"Also the perennial James," she added. "Really I shall blow up pretty soon if his father doesn't stop interfering in my affairs."

She took the curve into the next driveway without slackening speed, and swept 'round the circle in front of "The Mews" with a scatter of gravel. "Lafayette—we are here!" she announced. Two young people on the veranda who were evidently awaiting their arrival arose and threw themselves upon Charles with cries of joy, nearly upsetting him with the fury of their onslaught.

"Help! Police!" he panted, staving off the burgeoning pair. "These two young grizzlies are my offspring," he explained to their guest.

"Babs," a freckled athlete of seventeen, wrenched Peter's hand.

"Glad to know you!—I want to hear all about China," she confided to him before his feet had reached the ground. "I'm going there, the year after I come out, to find a nice bandit. Gay has vamped everything in this neighborhood."

"Carlo," a shy, black-haired boy, preceded them into the house with the bags. "Babs" was built like her father, and had his coloring, while "Carlo" was slender and more like Enid.

"Where's Mr. Morgan?" inquired Charles.

"I left him on the mantelpiece in the den," answered Gay, "but somebody must have put him somewhere else."

When Peter came down-stairs after dressing for dinner he found that the company had been augmented by several young things, including one Mr. James Thorne. The rhythmic rattle of cracked ice disclosed the whereabouts of Gay, who was shaking cocktails with the abandon of a professional. She nodded casually at him over the heads of the circle.

"She shakes a mean cocktail!" Jimmy informed Peter.

"It's perfectly safe. We've had 'em analyzed," explained the girl. "You don't have to take any chances whatever, Mr. McKay!"

Morgan, the mislaid, tapped him upon the shoulder.

"Don't let her vamp you!" he warned in a loud undertone. "For the sake of the nation there should remain one unkissed man in Nassau County."

Gay lifted her glass.

"Here's to 'the unkissed kiss'!" she said, looking at him.

The effrontery of her assumption that he must necessarily be her victim annoyed Peter, and he watched her half contemptuously through dinner, making no effort to return her sallies—impudent jade! A pity that with all this beauty there should be no heart behind it! The silver-gold of her hair, the dusky cream of her complexion, her veiled black eyes, her vitality and responsiveness,

were those of Ursula—yet how different was the total effect! And because she reminded him of Ursula and of the better self that Ursula had always called forth, he was unpleasantly conscious of his own deterioration, and, inconsistently enough, of the falsity and worthlessness of all women. They were both of a piece. This child was the limit! Beside her the Omaha widow and the convent doll from Montreal were the veriest pikers. But she was not going to run away with him. Every lift of her eyebrows, every gesture said plainly, arrogantly: "Well, my good sir, I am looking you over, and, upon the whole, you rather please me. What have you to offer?"

Peter assured himself that this was not his market. He wanted youth. But this was not the kind of youth he wanted, this enamelled sophistication, without reverence or tenderness! This girl, as coldly beautiful as a statue of Diana, that other huntress, bore no relation to the child wife of his dreams. Imagine her in a mining-camp! Or as a mother of children! She belonged in a beauty parlor or the Ritz—not a home. Leave her there!

In fact, he concluded that he had seen quite enough of her, and when the others gathered in the den for after-dinner coffee he did not follow, but crossed the veranda to the lawn by himself. A few crimson feathers still floated above the western cloud-line, but already the stars of heaven and the lights of earth were mingling together in a violet haze. A frosty halo above the elm tops showed that the moon was rising—the same moon that had cast its spell over him at Ursula's birthday party. This was the very spot where they had met. He strolled down to the water's edge. Well, that was all over and done with! The book closed and laid upon the shelf!

Automatically he followed the same path along the

edge of the beach. How still it was—just like that first evening. The pines on the point stood black against the saffron afterglow, and he threaded his way among the shadowy boles to the extreme tip of the grove where it jutted out into the bay. The Sound was a silver mirror clouded here and there by the breath of the night wind which whispered among the needles above his head as he leaned back against a convenient trunk.

How fragrant it was down there under the branches of the pines! How could they all sit indoors playing cards on an evening like this—smoking, drinking, straining their eyes, barking slang at one another! Wasters! That Gay, for example! A brazen little flirt! Her image swayed before him.

Was that glow on the horizon a fire? It was getting more lurid every moment. Mars—now at its nearest to the earth—climbed like a torch toward the zenith, spilling flame. It looked as if you could pick it out of the sky with your hand. Was it inhabited, he wondered? And by women? If not, he'd like to go there—there, straight into the bloody star that seemed to be swimming toward him, getting bigger and bigger, redder and redder, until it was all around him and he was in the middle of the fire.

A noise among the tree-trunks aroused him to attention. There it was again, and coming nearer!—A twig broke just at hand. He scrambled to his feet.

"Who's there?"

The voice of Ursula answered him.

"It's only me—Gay."

His heart, which had begun to beat violently, subsided. So she had followed him down there! Was this the family hunting-ground? It was here that Ursula had lured him into kissing her that first evening. It was just over there

that he had been startled by the sight of Enid in the arms of Carter Blair! Were they all, every father's daughter of them, alike? Why not give the brazen little flirt what she wanted? He took a step toward her, but the path was obscured by darkness.

"Hold on a minute!"

His struck match showed her almost beside him. This time he could not suppress his exclamation of astonishment. Surely it was Ursula. His hands trembled as he held the match over her head. The close-up had all of Ursula's seriousness.

"I hope you don't mind my following you down here," she said, in a tone not remotely resembling that of her first approach. "It's such a wonderful night, and this is one of my favorite spots. The gang are all in the den, listening to Bob Morgan discourse about love! Isn't it fierce? It made me sore on the whole bunch to have to stay there. And, well—I wanted to talk to you. I knew we'd made a false start. I saw I'd canned myself right at the go-off. After all, you're a good friend of father's. He's told me all you've done for him. He thinks the world of you, you know. And I wanted a chance to square myself—I'm not really like that—like what you think—at all!"

Her directness disarmed him. All his antagonism vanished.

"I'm highly complimented you should feel that way!" he assured her. "Let's talk, by all means. Here's a good place for you to sit—against that tree-trunk."

He gave her a hand to the edge of the bank and arranged a place for her on the pine needles.

"Cigarette?"

For an instant his match vied with Mars, and again he had the positive physical illusion of Ursula, this time

enhanced by the recollection of their evening together in these identical surroundings.

"It was sweet of you to come down," he said in the same tone he would have used to Ursula—the same he had used to Ursula that first night of their acquaintance—yet without any of his original perturbation or diffidence. So much, at least, had his worldly experiences done for him. He was now—superficially at least—the older man responding to the frank advances of a young girl. Yet already he was being subtly overpowered by her insidious resemblance to her aunt—a resemblance that was in effect more than a resemblance, for he did not even have to close his eyes to believe Ursula there.

"I knew all the time you weren't like that!" he said, and exultantly believed his statement to be true, although he had only her present word for it. Nobody could so outwardly resemble Ursula and not be like her in all respects! "Not that it matters!" he added irrelevantly.

"Why doesn't it matter?"

Now that she had challenged the apparent lack of courtesy in his last remark, he found himself unable to explain it. Of course, it mattered, since she had sought him out to rectify a false impression. Undoubtedly what had been in his mind was the obvious fact that if she was like Ursula—was Ursula, so to speak—there was nothing whatever to worry about.

"I didn't mean that exactly!" he protested rather lamely. "What I meant was that any one could see you weren't like that, so it wasn't necessary for you to tell me so."

He was illogical, yet palpably sincere, and she instinctively accepted the fact behind the unconvincing character of his explanation.

"I don't for a minute want you to think I dislike the crowd I go with or the kind of life I lead," she warned him. "I don't—I'm having the time of my life—and, by gosh!" she meditated, "I think it's a darn good life! But I couldn't bear to have you think that with all this miserable mess about mother I was just fooling around and letting my responsibilities go."

"I never could have thought that!"

"I wouldn't have blamed you if you had. That's why I followed you down here. I liked you right from the start and—Oh, well, you know how it is!—that very fact made me silly and self-conscious, I guess. I put my worst foot foremost and——"

"Don't let it worry you!" he interrupted. "You didn't fool me in the least. I knew from what your father told me——"

"Dad's such a corker, isn't he?"

"The best there is!"

"And you won't think me just a tough little fool?"

He laughed softly in protest. This golden child? This Ursula who was so much more than Ursula!

"My dear!" he said, "I think you're one of the nicest persons I ever met!"

She did not speak for a second or two after that.

"I hope you won't find yourself mistaken," she said. "I think you're pretty nice, too. So I want you to know the real me—the one underneath the cocktails and the —the 'unkissed kiss' stuff. I get frightfully dissatisfied sometimes. I was to-night. Bob had been pretending he wanted to marry me, and Jimmy was trying to bully me into marrying him—and—really I don't want to marry anybody yet!"

"I'm glad of that!" declared Peter feelingly. "Don't be in a hurry. It's quite an important matter, you know,

even in these light-minded days. You ought to be absolutely sure first what your real me wants."

The moon had disentangled itself from the branches above their heads and was peering down into their faces. From their feet the Sound stretched away like a field of silent snow, ringed by the faint circle of winking lights that marked the Connecticut shore. The world was still save for the occasional lap of water on the beach below. He could just see the contours of Gay's face as she leaned against the black trunk next him. It shone like a pearl in the dusk. He was very glad—amazingly glad—that she had not as yet committed herself to anybody else. Surely here was everything he had dreamed of.

"This is what I really like," she said. "Do you know that thing of Yeats's?

" 'I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made,'

"I forget the middle part, but it ends, you remember:

'There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnets' wings.' "

He recognized the verses instantly as the ones quoted by Ursula, and was impressed by her knowledge, ignorant of the fact that it was to Ursula alone that she owed her acquaintance with them.

"Go on!" he begged.

But she would not—or could not—in spite of his urging. She had so little time for poetry! But under the spell of the moonlight she told Peter many things about herself that struck him as delightfully unusual. And then, of course, out of mere reciprocal politeness, he was obliged to give her a brief outline of his own youth, edu-

cation, career, religious and philosophical beliefs, artistic tastes, social observations, and ultimate ambitions. Mars had disappeared behind them when he discovered that his cigarette box was empty and that it was nearly midnight. Their obliviousness to the flight of time seemed to have demonstrated their congeniality. Peter lifted Gay to her feet and followed her through the grove out upon the lawn.

"After all!" she remarked, "they couldn't think anything worse of us than that I'd been letting you make love to me."

"Well, have you?" he asked, bending toward her.

"Are you sure you know how?—No! Please!" she reproved him, and his arm dropped. "You're proceeding much too rapidly. That sort of thing needs more of a background, don't you think?"

"Of what sort?" he demanded.

"Well," she answered judicially, "I shouldn't let you put your arm around me unless I was willing to marry you, and I'll have to know you a lot better before that happens. However——"

She gave him her hand.

They were coming up the rise toward the veranda, and he continued to hold it for an appreciable space of time longer than mere courtesy demanded. Then she hastily wrenched it away.

"Hello!" Jimmy Thorne emerged from the shadow. "We were just going to send out search parties for you!" His voice indicated something more than irritation.

"Good-night, Mr. McKay!" said Gay, once more extending her hand to Peter. "Good-night, James, darling!" floated behind her as she passed through the doorway.

Reviewing his recent experience as he fell asleep, Peter

had almost the illusion of having had a recurrent dream, differing only in the unimportant detail that in the former instalment he had kissed the lady and in the latter he had not. But in each case midnight had been "all a glimmer," and the evening "full of the linnets' wings."

Thus, with a brief hiatus, romance came to Peter for the second time—in curious fashion, almost like a continuation of the first. Gay seemed to him everything his boyish vision had called for, and the fact that he believed he had originally misjudged her made him all the more ready to accredit her with attributes that a longer acquaintance might have disclosed as wanting. Her frankness, her daring, her gaiety, and her originality charmed and delighted him. He was flattered that, surrounded as she was by dashing young fellows of her own age, she nevertheless seemed to prefer his society to theirs, inevitably deferred to his judgment and experience, and never failed to treat his daily afternoon arrival as an event of importance.

To his untutored appreciation, Gay appeared as intellectual for her years as Ursula. He could not know, of course, that most of whatever culture she possessed she had derived from her aunt—and that at best it was but a parroting of Ursula's ideas and often even of her actual phraseology. For Gay was really a totally uneducated young person whose knowledge of literature and poetry had been chiefly acquired from what books she had picked up in the library at "Folly Farm." She had a sort of street-urchin quickness which passed for cleverness, but, doing nearly everything well as a matter of course, her only genuine accomplishment was bridge. In reality, like most of her friends, she was fundamentally *ennuyée*. She had no resources, and never did anything alone except to lie in bed. Rather than sit down by herself for

an hour or even less, she would motor ten miles to find another girl to chatter with. She regarded herself as a sophisticated woman of the world, and, on the whole, rather wicked—but, in spite of the fact that she wore practically nothing above her waist or underneath her dress, talked like a sporting duchess and danced like a Salome, discoursed fluently upon free love, birth control, and "sex attraction," she had a chastity that under the circumstances was astounding and an innocence that was unbelievable.

It was not her frivolous side, however, which Gay presented to Peter, for without any intention to deceive she naturally sought to show him what she believed he would like to see in her; and in this his lack of social experience conspired with his absence of culture to make her eminently successful.

The girl, herself, was enjoying her first exhilarating experience of fascinating an older man. Peter had for her all the glamour that surrounds success. He was the "strong, silent" hero of the novels she had devoured at the age of Babs—not only strong and silent, but with the additional halo of one who has conquered the secret places of the earth. Peter's sound judgment, his hearty encouragement in her decision to stick to her father, had meant everything to her! Charles, himself, had said: "If you're ever in doubt about anything and I'm not around, go straight to Peter." What stronger recommendation could she have had?

The affair progressed rapidly. Gay was always waiting in her roadster when he left the train at Glen Cove, ready to motor him across the island for a swim or picnic supper and a leisurely run home in the afterglow. No background could have been more romantic, no ingénue more ideally fitted to play the part of heroine in the new love-

drama. The stage was set, the call-bell ringing, the actors in their places, although so far Peter had rehearsed only the part of a still vigorous uncle,—a rather tender one, to be sure, but strictly within the bounds of avuncular decorum.

Is it surprising that Peter so soon fancied himself again in love; indeed, thought he had fallen in love with Gay at first sight? There is no doubt that she had an extraordinary fascination for him, by reason of her likeness to the woman he had lost, and it was natural that he should have attributed to Gay all the qualities that had so attracted him to her aunt. To Peter she was, in fact, Ursula, not Gay—whatever Gay may in reality have been—an Ursula endowed with everything that had made the original so infinitely alluring and desirable, and with none of the supposed defects of age. The sight of Gay's fresh young face, unruffled and wholly innocent of line, obscured his mental image of Ursula, just as the writing upon a palimpsest obliterates that which formerly appeared there. Had the faces been less alike the erasure would have been less complete. As it was, the one merged wholly in the other—a single beautiful composite; yet, as in the palimpsest, the first writing, although for the time being invisible, was still there.

CHAPTER XX

As predicted by M. Joignot, the judge duly signed the order of "non-conciliation" between Charles and Enid, which, together with a copy of the amended "assignation," was then served upon the former at his "actual domicile," 49 Rue des Catalans. Enid was now entirely free to return to America. An interlocutory judgment, already agreed upon by the lawyers, and which would become automatically final in another two months, would be entered as a matter of course, the parties in the meantime being divorced subject to being undivorced, so to speak, if there turned out to have been any mistake—a sort of purgatorial interim in which they were not definitely either married or unmarried.

Charles, before his departure for America, had out of abundant caution been escorted to the Rue de l'Odéon in order that old Louise might know how he looked, but the police had not called, and there was no reason to suppose that they would do so. M. Joignot assured Enid that there would be no trouble about anything. He thought it better, however, for Enid to remain in Paris for the present, in order to be on hand in case there should be any unexpected slip-up. Enid, nothing loath, continued her career of intensive spending, ably assisted by Teeny. M. Joignot was constantly in evidence at the Ritz, sartorially funereal in spite of his high spirits. The Kent divorce, which had gone through on schedule time in spite of the government's disrupting order, was undeniably a feather in his legal cap, and on the strength of it he obtained several new and profitable clients.

No echo of her intention to remarry had reached the press, although it seemed to be universally taken for granted that nobody would go to the trouble of getting a divorce except for that purpose. She was glad she had been circumspect, as it would be many weeks before her decree would become absolute, and she did not wish any announcement until just before her marriage. Her engagement could "leak out" gradually, without any publicity. She had had enough of that.

She had cabled Carter as soon as the order of "non-conciliation" had been signed, and he had urged her to return at once that they might marry at the earliest possible moment. But apart from the delay advised by M. Joignot, Enid had other plans. She had no intention of going back to New York in midsummer and being married when everybody was out of town. On the contrary, she proposed to have the ceremony performed at St. Timothy's by the Reverend Roderick Thrum, assisted by a full choir and the police reserves. This, since the promulgation of the new divorce order by the French Government, had become an integral part of her scheme.

It was the twentieth of August when the judgment was finally signed. Enid had her passage already reserved, and, having had a copy of her decree certified before the American consul, as required by the New York statutes, there was nothing left for her to do but pack her things and set sail for home. She did, however, feel that the occasion was deserving of some commemoration, and, as a quasi-present from her fiancée, purchased for herself a charming little cigarette case of gold and platinum set with precious stones.

"Why don't you have your signature put on it in diamonds," suggested Teeny, "like that Austrian countess we met yesterday!"

The idea appealed to Enid, and with some emotion she wrote for the first time her future name and gave it to the jeweller for reproduction. It was the one thing necessary to make her feeling of emancipation complete. Enid Blair—a pretty name! Now she was really a new person. She had cast off all the old ties, even her old appellation. Until she was married she would call herself Mrs. Weybridge-Kent.

The ship was crowded as usual on westbound summer sailings, and Enid, who had sat at the captain's right on the way over, found herself relegated to a small table by herself on the balcony in the saloon. Her chagrin was not lessened by the alternative offer of the chief steward to seat her with a very ordinary family from nowhere in particular, and since she naturally preferred a dignified isolation to the company of her social inferiors, she took most of her meals on deck.

She had had such a gay time in France that the sudden lowering of the social temperature was the more chilling. At the Ritz, surrounded by women more or less like herself, she had been a prominent figure; but on the *Paris*, divergent as were the social extremities of the passenger list, a more conservative element was clearly in the ascendant, and her importance seemed to have shrunk to nothing. There was, in fact, no one who exhibited any marked yearning for her society, and she sometimes suspected, owing to the studiousness with which those in the deck chairs glued their eyes to their books as she walked along by herself, that she was the subject of concealed interest.

Had it not been for Miss Hazel Bond, who introduced herself the third day out as a friend of Teeny's, Enid would have been bored to death. The life-saver was a shingle-headed young blonde in a blue tam and Russian

jacket with silver-fox collar—a touch of elegant simplicity that appealed strongly to Enid's conservative tastes. They were soon inseparable, and Miss Bond presently gave up her place at the commissaire's table and joined Enid on the balcony, to keep her from being lonely. This social sacrifice touched Enid, and, as Miss Bond appeared to be already familiar with most of the details of her divorce, she saw no reason for not talking freely to her, taking, of course, the utmost care never to mention Blair or the possibility of a remarriage. Enid, from her own point of view, was a model of discretion on board ship, and the voyage passed smoothly, except for the momentary worry occasioned the day before they sighted Fire Island by the loss of her vanity bag, containing the jewelled cigarette case, but which was duly found and returned to her through the chief deck steward. She and Hazel Bond stood side by side on the upper deck as the *Paris* forged through the "rum fleet" that dotted the ocean off Long Island like a flock of sinister gray gulls—which prompted Enid to remark that it was not so much prohibition that she objected to as the demoralization it occasioned. It had turned the United States into a nation of lawbreakers!

The city showed its teeth over the horizon, the pilot tooted alongside, and the nervous passengers hurried once more to their staterooms to make perfectly sure that they had distributed, with sufficient circumspection, their more expensive purchases among goods less obviously dutiable. Surrounded by steamer trunks, bags and tissue paper, Enid, through the porthole, smelled once more the dank odor she associated with freedom. At last! She sat down on the edge of her bunk and lit a cigarette, listening to the procession of feet along the passageway outside.

Already most of the passengers, dressed with a noticeably suspicious elegance, were standing or sitting in the saloon, awaiting the arrival of the quarantine officer. Enid, however, had no intention of getting caught in any such mob. Sheep! One went into the saloon, quite by accident, perhaps, and they all immediately rushed in after. They were like that in everything, including their attitude toward other people. Only get them started right. She would manage it! She had managed everything else and she would manage that.

The vibration of the propellers had ceased, save for a desultory throb or two, and the steam-winch was hard at work hoisting the baggage out of the hold. Outside the confusion had noticeably increased. It was time to go on deck. She threw her cigarette through the porthole and picked up her hand-bag just as there was a sharp rap upon the partition.

"This is Mrs. Kent's stateroom, sir."

A wave of excitement swept over her, tingling, as she opened the door. Her prospective husband's huge bulk filled the aperture. How imposing, how good-looking he was!

"Oh, Carter!" she cried, lifting herself toward him. "How sweet of you to come down to meet me!"

He took her in his arms and kissed her several times without a word. She noticed that he smelled of whiskey. It annoyed her that he should have been drinking at that hour in the morning.

"By God! But I'm glad to see you after all these weeks!" he said at last. "Have a good trip over?"

"Perfectly splendid! I was lonely, of course!"

Rather a banal meeting for a pair of lovers, she thought. She could see now that something was bothering him.

"How is everything?"

He hesitated, then closed the door.

"Oh, all right, I guess!" He looked around the stateroom for a place to sit. Finding none, he said:

"Look here, Enid, did you tell anybody coming over on the ship that we were going to be married?"

"I! Tell anybody! Of course not! It's the one thing——"

"Well," he replied stolidly, "the news is out. It'll be all over town to-morrow. A reporter from the Associated Press called me up last night and wanted to know if it was true that we expected to be married. I naturally jollied him the best I could—tried the old stall of saying that that was up to you—but he came back at me with the statement that one of their people had wired it from the ship and must have had it direct."

Enid felt sick for the first time on the voyage.

"I never said one word to anybody!" she declared, her voice trailing off weakly, as she suddenly remembered the lost cigarette case. "But, after all," she added stoutly, "what difference does it make—so long as we are! People have got to know *sometime!*"

"It isn't that," he answered, biting his moustache, "but the damned ferret insisted on asking me a whole lot of questions about my own divorce. I got sore and told him it was none of his business. I wish now I hadn't. It was a mistake. It doesn't pay to antagonize those chaps. Finally I told him my first wife had divorced me in Arizona ten years ago, if that would do him any good, and that I'd appeared personally in the action on purpose, so no question of regularity could ever be raised. It was damn queer, though, I thought, his asking me that!"

"Why, it seems perfectly natural to me!" she pro-

tested. "Of course, you couldn't marry again unless you had been divorced!"

"Well, it's all right that way," he said. "I suppose if you're going ashore we might as well go on deck."

The *Paris* was moving slowly along the docks, followed by a covey of snorting tugs, and as Enid and Carter came up the companionway, most of the passengers were crowded in the bow; but they had hardly reached the comparative seclusion of the after-deck before they were surrounded by a half-dozen cameras.

"Excuse me, Mr. Blair!" said the spokesman of the group, touching his hat. "I'm Dugan, the *City News* man, and this is Fair, of the A. P., and Crocker, of the *Daily News*. We've been looking everywhere for you and Mrs. Kent. Our people have sent us here to get a picture, anyhow, and an interview, if possible. I'm sorry. But it's not our fault. Do you mind posing for us?"

Blair stifled his first impulse to slay. After all, as Dugan said, it wasn't their fault. It paid to stand in with the press. He had made one break too many that way, already. He looked inquiringly at Enid, who smiled genially at the circle of newspapermen.

"Why not?" she asked gaily, as she took Carter's arm and wheeled his big body toward the firing line. "Shoot when you see the whites of our eyes!" The barrage of shutters flickered.

"Thanks!" said Mr. Dugan. "I don't suppose you'd care to make a statement, would you?"

"You can quote me as saying that copper will go to fourteen cents," said Blair simply.

"That's not the kind of statement I mean. We should like something about your intended marriage."

"As to that—not a word!" snapped the victim. Then, as if thinking better of it, he pulled a handful of cigars

from his pocket and passed them around with a "Be easy on us, boys!"

"Perhaps if Mrs. Kent were not here? Privately?" persisted Dugan.

"Nothing to say!" repeated Blair. "Come, Enid!—It beats me what it's all about!" he muttered as they swung rapidly away from the reporters. Forward of the smoking-room they ran into Dugan once more.

"Excuse me again," he apologized. "I'm not asking for anything this time. I've just been wondering if by any possibility you've not seen this? You seemed so surprised——"

Blair took the first edition of the *Herald Tribune*, which he held out to him.

"Here," said Dugan, pointing to the front page.

"Let me see it!" cried Enid, drawing it toward her. It was the second column from the left that carried her name—and her doom.

SAME WOMAN FIGURES IN TWO DIVORCES

By Special Cable

Paris, Aug. 28.—It is now known that Mrs. Charles Kent who recently secured a divorce here from her husband, the well-known ex-polo player, under the new rule requiring proof of a ground recognized as valid in the State where the marriage was performed, named as co-respondent one Myrtle Reid, of New York. Under the French procedure, in view of the admission of Mr. Kent that the charge was well-founded, proof was allowed by affidavit.

Associated Press Marconigram, Cape Sable, Nova Scotia (reprinted from yesterday's issue). S.S. *Paris*.—It is understood that Mrs. Charles Cotesworth Kent, of New York and Westbury, who was recently divorced from her husband, is about to marry Mr. Carter Blair, president of the Calizona Copper Company of which her husband formerly was assistant treasurer.

Oxide, Ariz., Aug. 28.—An examination of the records of the County Clerk's office here discloses that Mr. Blair was divorced by his former wife in 1904 on the ground of adultery, the name of the co-respondent being one Myrtle Green, formerly of Bisbee.

Mrs. Myrtle Reid, the co-respondent named by Mrs. Kent in her Paris divorce proceeding, when seen this morning at her apartment, 1093 Riverside Drive, admitted that her maiden name was Green and that she is the same Myrtle Green who figured as co-respondent in the suit brought in Oxide, Arizona, by the last wife of Carter Blair, in which the court granted a decree of divorce, while permitting either party to marry again.

"Hold that a second, please!" requested a voice.

Carter, staring bewildered at the sheet between them, choked down an oath. A shutter flopped softly. "Thanks!"

"What does it mean, Carter? Is it true?"

He had turned pasty.

"I suppose it is, if they say so. That was the woman's name. I don't see what difference it makes, anyway! It wasn't any better for Kent to go with her than for me, was it?"

The heavy diapason of the funnel shook the deck under their feet and the sky darkened with escaping steam. It was as if hell yawned. She felt the nausea that accompanies a seismic shock. Was it possible that he could not realize the position he had put her in?

"Why did you use the same woman?" she demanded severely.

"How the devil did I know it was the same woman? I hadn't seen or heard of her for ten years. I didn't know she was in New York. I didn't know she had changed her name."

Half a dozen tugs were nosing the *Paris* into the dock. They filled the sunlit air with their panting.

"No–no! No–no! No–no!"

"You have put me in a very awkward position, Carter," she said.

He pulled impatiently at his moustache.

"Well, if I have I'm sorry!" he said. "But damned if I see why!"

CHAPTER XXI

As Enid and Carter descended the gang-plank they found themselves once more the focus of a circle of cameras. "Click!—Click!—Click-clock!"

"For God's sake let's get out of this!" exclaimed Blair, pulling her to one side. "I'll run you up to the hotel and attend to your luggage afterwards!"

She had never seen him bite his moustache in that nervous way before. He was absent-minded in the motor, answering her questions as to his Western trip in monosyllables and asking her none in return. Thus, exchanging hardly a word, they traversed the entire distance to the Croyon, where Carter had engaged a suite for her. The reporters had preceded them, however, and a crowd blocked the sidewalk, as with an assumption of gaiety they pushed their way past the cameras, up the steps and into the foyer of the hotel.

The throng here was almost as large as that outside. There was no help for it, and, stepping ahead of Enid, Blair took the bull—in the person of the room clerk—by the horns.

"You have that apartment for Mrs. Kent?"

"Yes, sir!—Front!"

Quite a different home-coming from what her imagination had painted.

"The best they had!" Blair led her through the rose-gilt drawing-room, and threw open the door of a bedroom panelled in pale gray. "Sets me back six hundred and seventy-five a week."

"Oh, Carter!"

If he was willing to pay all that money he must love her!

"What perfectly charming rooms!" she cried with affected rapture.

Blair tipped the waiting bell-hop, and putting down his hat came toward her.

"Well, my darling! We haven't done this for some time!"

"Oh, Carter!"

He did love her! In the assurance afforded by his kiss she realized how black the future would be if he did not.

"I do adore you, Carter!" she sighed as she unclasped his neck. "You love me just as much as ever, don't you, dearest?"

"I'll say I do!" he declared. "You mustn't mind my having been grouchy over that break in the newspapers. This has been an ordeal. If I'd had the slightest suspicion of what was going to happen I'd have made other arrangements. But who cares! We'll be a nine-days' wonder and then everybody'll forget us!"

"I don't know that I want them to forget us. I shall be very proud of being Mrs. Carter Blair!"

He smiled clumsily.

"The pleasure is going to be all mine! Well—! Let me have your keys and I'll go back and run your stuff through the customs. I've got a pull with the collector——"

It struck her that he seemed anxious to get away. Was he only a fair-weather lover? Or had he discovered during her absence that she was not indispensable to his happiness?

He stood now fidgeting, a deep furrow between his heavily tufted eyebrows, as she fished in her bag. But

her fingers were all thumbs and she could not seem to find her keys. Why must he stand there staring at her.

"I put them there just before we left the stateroom!"

"Here, let me look!" He took the bag from her impatiently. The first thing he took out was the cigarette case.

"What's that?"

"My cigarette case!"

She felt it an inauspicious time for explaining that it was a present from him. He laid it on the inlaid table—then bent over and peered at it curiously.

"Hello! 'Enid Blair,' eh?"

He gave her a half-ironic glance.

"No wonder they were on to you!"

"I had it made at Cartier's. Things are so much cheaper over there, you know. Of course I was careful not to let anybody see it. I think I see now what happened. It was in this same bag, and I lost it——"

"My God!" he blurted. "Haven't you any sense?"

Real tears sprang to her eyes.

"Carter! You mustn't speak to me like that!"

He softened.

"I'm sorry! But this damn thing has got my goat! Things aren't going exactly as I could wish at the office, either. I'm sorry I went away. I hope this business isn't going to raise a rumpus with the directors. No reason why it should, of course! Here are your keys!—Well, so long! I'll have your trunks here in half an hour!"

He kissed her perfunctorily and walked out, leaving Enid alone in the apartment. Minus every human touch save that of the decorator, its ornate elegance added to her depression. Even Carter's handsome bouquet of

American beauties on the centre table seemed insignificant in contrast with the size of the room and the height of the ceiling. Funny to be sitting all alone in a big gilded armchair in that strange place! This was the first time she had ever returned from Europe without being met by Charles and the children. The room seemed terribly empty. Was her future life, by any chance, going to be as empty as this? She shoved the thought behind her. Had she made a mistake, after all? Carter was personally clean, anyhow!

The smell of flowers and upholstery made her think of a funeral. With her head thrown back on a satin cushion and surrounded by roses, it was like being at her own! The idea was unpleasant, and she went over to the table for her cigarette case. What had ever possessed her to order it? The only slip she had made—yet enough to "can" everything! She remembered having once heard that no criminal ever lived so shrewd as not to make some trifling mistake—which often accomplished his ruin.

The mere sight of the hateful thing gave her a turn, and she took out two cigarettes, so that she need not open it a second time. Lighting one, she pulled a chair to the window and looked out over Central Park. A dried-up looking place! And such shabby-looking people! She compared it unfavorably with the Bois. She had not realized that New York was going to be so hot. Six hundred and seventy-five dollars a week! It really hadn't been necessary to spend all that money merely on rooms! He could have got a whole floor in Paris for that. Paris! Already she wished herself back there at the Ritz, looking across the Place Vendôme. She could have stayed over another month as well as not. Nothing particular to do in New York except to find an apart-

ment. She was glad Carter had taken a box for the polo. It would make an excellent first appearance. She must get just the right people.

The telephone on the desk went off suddenly with a shrill clatter. A reporter for the *Journal* was asking for an interview.

"I have nothing for publication!" she answered sharply, trying to recall the appropriate phraseology.

In a way this publicity was not entirely ungrateful, for it gave her a sense of social prominence. People were naturally interested.

Blair returned shortly after one, bearing orchids. Her trunks would be along now any minute, he said. How about lunch? If she preferred, they could have it served up-stairs. But the suggestion did not strike Enid with favor, and they descended to the dining-room.

The deference accorded them by the maître d'hôtel pleased her vanity, and as they followed him to a table by the window she felt almost as if she were in Paris again. The music, the chatter, the atmosphere of smartness was unction to her soul—so, in a way, was the attention they undeniably seemed to attract.

Carter was still *distrait*, and they ate in silence to "Contes d'Hoffmann." There were several women lunching there whom she recognized, but all were too far away to bow to, even had they seen her, which apparently they had not. She had intended to broach the subject of their marriage at once, but sensed that the moment would be inopportune. She could afford to let that rest for a day or two. Luncheon over, they returned to the apartment. The trunks had arrived, and the maid was waiting to help Enid unpack. Blair said he must "hurry along."

"About to-night?" he asked. "Is there anything you

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want to do? Not much fun sitting around here! How about a play?"

"I'd love it!" she exclaimed, already dreading the prospect of an evening spent in desultory converse in that vast mortuary chamber. "Let's go to something gay!"

"Is there anybody you'd like to ask to go with us?" he inquired.

Enid could not at the moment think of any one.

She was occupied all the afternoon with unpacking, and by the time Blair returned from down-town had succeeded in making her rooms look somewhat more homelike. He had invited Bob Morgan to dine with them, he said, but the architect, while sending his regards, had confessed to an engagement. However, he had been lucky in getting, at the eleventh hour, two seats for the Follies—a gala performance in honor of H. R. H. She must put on her best frock—both go in full fig. He had evidently had several cocktails and was inclined to be affectionate. She was conscious of his eyes sliding over her figure as she sat opposite him at table.

"By God, you're lovely to-night!" he whispered, pressing her knee with his.

In the motor he was almost too much so—he had never been quite like that before, and it frightened her a little. Well, she had made the plunge—she could not balk now at familiarities she had invited heretofore! He must be encouraged—not repressed. She could not afford to stand on technicalities. After all, it was just a question of degree—what he did. The realization that she had burned her bridges made her reckless.

This was what she had wanted,—security, power, smartness,—orchids and champagne. The padded comfort of the big motor, Carter's arm about her shoulders, the blurred radiance of the flashing lights, the buzz and

warmth of the wine that seemed to be creeping all through her body, gave her the illusion of happiness, and, as she pressed closely behind him in the crowded foyer, she felt that this was the life that she desired.

The theatre was already full, and their last-minute arrival, as the usher conducted them down the aisle to the second row, occasioned a slight sensation in an audience already primed. The gentleman on the end arose to let them pass, and Enid, crowding by with profuse apologies, found herself next to a well-known New York hostess whom she had once met at dinner and had thereafter always referred to as a friend.

Their eyes met and she bowed.

"How do you do, Mrs. Thayne," said Enid. "So sorry to disturb you!"

Mrs. Thayne made a hardly noticeable inclination and looked away. Enid's blush at the too obvious rebuff was luckily hidden by the sinking of the footlights and the rise of the curtain.

She was glad to huddle down in her seat in the semi-obscurity. The old cat had practically cut her! She tried to find enjoyment in the comedians and the fantastic dresses of the chorus, but all the time she was asking herself if the incident could have any real significance. A murmur ran over the house, and the faces of the audience turned with one accord toward the two boxes upon the right, where a group of gentlemen were seating themselves. "There he is, in front!" she heard on all sides. The excitement passed, and presently attention was again directed to the stage. But Enid's refused to be concentrated. Of course, she must expect some people not to be nice to her—at first particularly. In time she would win back entirely. She would have to proceed carefully, step by step, just as she and Teeny had planned. Perhaps

it had been an error to select such a conspicuous occasion for her début as a divorcée.

The curtain fell, the lights sprang on, and the audience once more feasted its starved eyes on royalty—Enid among the rest.

"Charming, isn't he?" she whispered to Carter, as the guest of the evening smiled good-naturedly at what the man beside him was saying. Then she saw that the man was Charles,—Charles smart, genial, healthy-looking,—in the artificial light, much as when she had first known him.

What could he be doing there? The two seemed on very friendly terms! Then she remembered. Sandringham—Windsor—King Edward! "When my husband was visiting the royal family at Buckingham Palace—!" Her own elaborate pretense—now demonstrated to be fact. The green-eyed toad leaped upon her lap, as Blair grunted:

"Your ex-husband seems to be having a swell time!" Others in the audience had had the same thought apparently. She was conscious of a shifting of glances between the prince's box and their own seats. Mrs. Thayne was giving them the benefit of her full décolleté. A bad quarter of an hour! She confessed to a difference in cut between Carter and the men in the box—with the exception, of course, of Charles. Had she acted too hastily? With studied indifference she twirled an orchid, pretending with meaningless smiles and gesticulations to carry on a conversation with her escort; then at the second rise of the curtain, complaining of faintness, she asked him to take her back to the hotel.

The foyer attendants watched them curiously as they left the theatre. "Coming back, mister?" Seats were retailing at thirty-five dollars, and Carter's stubs would have brought twelve on the sidewalk.

"Pretty rough, by George!" He sank down heavily

beside her in the taxi. "I don't blame you for wanting to clear out. No one could have expected——"

"It's nothing! Nothing at all!"

They coasted in silence up Eighth Avenue, now comparatively clear of traffic. Everything would be like that —plain-sailing after the first jam. But meantime——!

She saw herself completely isolated, absolutely dependent upon the man beside her. Had she been foolish to put herself so unreservedly in his power? They flashed around Columbus Circle and, aided by the glare, she found the automatic lighter and lit a cigarette. She must make some sort of a stand.

"I'm wondering if it's quite wise for us to be seen together like this—" She seemed to ponder.

"Wise?—Why not?"

"Of course, I don't mean at places of amusement. But I'm not sure we ought to be staying at the same hotel until—until we're married. It might make talk."

"Bunk! Who gives a damn?"

She blinked the obvious bitter truth that nobody did. A little stiffly she said:

"I—for one!"

He cocked his cigar as a substitute for a shrug.

"Never occurred to me! However, that part of it's done! Everybody knows we're at the Croyon. In fact, the evening papers had it."

"But must they see us going in and out every time? Coming home together like this, I mean?"

"There's a ladies' entrance on the side street, if you prefer to use that. I can go in by the front door."

He was used to such subterfuges. But this was not that kind of an affair. Why the devil——?

"I think I'd like the side door better, anyway," she said. "It saves going through that great, draughty hall."

"All right! Same to me!"

He hesitated as the taxi came to a stop, whether to let her get out by herself or do the polite thing.

"Don't get out! Nobody need know that you're even with me," she whispered, as she opened the door and stepped by him. "Now go to the main entrance!" she directed the bewildered driver.

Hurrying furtively down the empty corridors past watchful maids placed at every strategic point, she felt like a faithless wife keeping a rendezvous. Yet she had every legal and moral right—she assured herself—to be doing exactly what she was. Then why must everything be surreptitious? Her salon seemed sanctuary, and she shut the door behind her, dropping her wrap upon a chair with a sigh. It was, as she had told Carter, really a lovely room. She opened the French window and stepped upon the balcony. The park was festooned with a million lights —some blue, some white, some with a reddish tinge. It was such a relief to be out there in the dark where no one could see her. That last maid had had eyes like a ferret!

She beat time with her toe on the railing to the music below. "Buckley ('Buck') Wall and his famous orchestra. Nightly. Couvert $3.50"—she had read the sign in the elevator. Carter did not dance. He must learn. Reentering the salon to get a cigarette, she noticed for the first time a silver bucket, containing a bottle of champagne, standing on a side-table. Champagne! Rather nice not to have to think about money! As she laid down her match Carter came in arrayed in a smoking-jacket. Once more she felt his eyes sliding up and down her figure.

"Well!" he remarked, moving toward the side-table. "We're here—anyhow!"

CHAPTER XXII

PETER'S visit to "The Mews," originally planned for two weeks, imperceptibly lengthened to three, then four. Gossip over the Kent divorce had already been submerged in the universal excitement over the approaching visit to America of the Prince of Wales. Long Island seethed with plot and counterplot over possession of the royal body—an amazing exhibition of vulgarity against which no voice was raised in protest, since acquiescence in the universal snobbery was the only way to escape the imputation of sour grapes.

Families socially distinguished who were unable to secure Baron Renfrew for dinner, lunch, or even afternoon tea, went into retirement, while others unaccountably favored (in deference perhaps to the democratic principle, enunciated by John Hancock and others for the benefit of a certain royal ancestor—that all Americans are born equal) enjoyed a temporary prominence even more grateful because totally unexpected.

The knowledge that Enid had thrown away the highest distinction the visiting scion of the House of Hanover could confer gave the few possessed of it secret joy; and its irony, in the end, formed the last lees in her disillusionment. But the social rumpus served to smother what certainly under other circumstances would have figured as the most élite scandal of the season, and to that extent, at least, she was for the time being a gainer by the prince's visit. It also diverted attention from the fact that Miss Kent had annexed a new and very

heavy beau in place of Mr. James Thorne, who was conspicuous by reason of his absence from "The Mews." The coolness between them had started during their fishing trip to the Restigouche, following the cruise on *The Astarte.*

The obvious purpose of the elder Thorne to force Gay's hand had led to a flare-up on her part which had actually frightened the well-meaning but tactless old millionaire. She had lost a thirty-pound salmon after playing him for over fifty minutes, which made his blundering on that particular afternoon all the more malapropos. Jimmy was fishing Half-Mile Pool, up-stream.

"When you are Mrs. James Thorne," his father had said in his kindly, humorous way, after they had come off river and Gay was pouring tea for him on the cabin veranda—"when you are Mrs. James Thorne, my dear——"

Gay had replaced the teapot on the table with a thump that sent the contents squirting through the nozzle.

"Look here, Mr. Thorne!" she had cried with a vehemence that made him jump—looking him straight in the eyes: "If it wasn't that I want to be entirely fair to Jimmy, I'd give you a piece of my mind. If you want to can that young man's chances with me forever—you'll go right on talking about when I'm Mrs. James Thorne. I've no doubt your intentions are honorable. You love Jimmy, and you think you're doing him a good turn. You've got an idea that you're a matrimonial diplomat. Well, pardon my frankness, you're nothing but an old busybody. You're under the delusion that because you have made a few millions reorganizing railroads you can reorganize other people's lives. You can't! For God's sake leave me alone!"

The encounter had resulted in a certain feeling be-

tween the parties concerned which had lasted until their return. Poor old Mr. Thorne had nursed his wounded paws in silence, realizing his mistake but equally resenting her tirade. She had talked to him like a traffic cop! Well, he had his pet charities! Jimmy had suspected something and wisely held his tongue. In spite of Gay's subsequent success in landing a thirty-five pounder, relations had continued strained, and it had become obvious to Jimmy that the trip from which he hoped so much had only served to postpone the day when Gay might agree to become his wife.

That she would not ultimately do so he refused to believe. For three years now she had given every indication that she not only was exceedingly fond of him, but preferred his society to that of any other male companion —until the advent of McKay, who seemed to have cast a spell over her from the moment of their first meeting. The lad took his medicine gamely, throwing himself stoically into his polo practice and leaving a fair field to his older competitor. It was only natural that Gay should feel flattered at the attention accorded her by a man like Peter; but she would get over it. At any rate, he conceded, she showed better judgment in the present case than she sometimes had in the past, when she had found some of the worst bounders "perfectly fascinating" and "too sweet for anything." You had to give a girl like that her head! And, because he spent less and less time at "The Mews," perhaps, his game improved to such an extent that it now looked as if he would almost certainly make the team.

Charles considered the lad potentially one of the best players he had ever seen. All he needed was the steadiness which results only from experience. Charles, happier than he had been in years, had come into his own in a

most surprising way. His time was now entirely taken up with arrangements for the polo and the prince. "The Mews" swarmed with trim English youths, whose presence under other conditions might have occasioned James considerable uneasiness—and who were constantly getting in Peter's way. The latter had nothing to complain about, however. His courtship was galloping successfully to a finish. Gay refused to look at anybody else, and, after having weighed the matter carefully, had decided, if and when he asked her, to marry him.

That he would ask her she had no doubt. Anybody could see that he was simply crazy about her. She liked so much his sensible way of looking at things, his decisiveness, and his inevitable politeness and consideration. He never ragged her the way Jimmy did; never left her to open doors or carry coats for herself; never contradicted her or told her she didn't know what she was talking about. He was always gentle and soothing—never acting as an irritant. In short, she found him absolutely delightful and satisfying.

Not that she cared particularly about marrying. She would have been quite content to go on seeing Peter just that way indefinitely—and having all the fun of being a gay young thing besides. She did not, when she faced the issue frankly, find the prospect of giving up her present life of enjoyment particularly alluring, but she realized that it could not go on forever. There was always the other party, and the other party was never satisfied to let things stay as they were. It was clear that she would have no peace until she married somebody, and as between Peter and Jimmy, certainly the former had everything in his favor except money. Money, be it said to her credit, hardly entered into her calculations. She was probably quite unconscious that what really attracted

her most to Peter was his integrity. She did not formulate it, but she found something in him which she had hitherto found only in her Aunt Ursula—something that appealed to her spiritual side. She had been sincere when she had told him that she was dissatisfied. By contrast with the men with whom she was customarily thrown in society, Peter seemed to her almost of heroic mould. And because he was twelve years older than she was, she placed him upon a pedestal and idealized him as she would never have thought of doing in the case of a man of her own age. So far as she was concerned, Peter was the perfect man.

He had dined at "The Mews" with intention, and Babs and Carlo, perhaps scenting something, had immediately afterwards departed for the movies. Walton had passed the coffee and vanished into the pantry—also perhaps scenting something. And Gay,—who certainly did!—sat with a studiously detached look on her smooth face. Of course, Peter had no suspicion how nervous she was. His declaration would not, he fancied, greatly surprise her, but it would certainly agitate her extremely, and he did not wish to agitate her. She was much too pretty with the candle-light throwing a golden penumbra about her head. The child-wife of his youthful dreams! He experienced a feeling of expansion in his lumbar region. But he controlled himself. The avuncular manner was rather becoming to Peter.

"Have you ever thought that I might want to marry you?" he asked quizzically.

She gave an embarrassed little laugh, but looked him full in the eyes.

"Why, yes! Often!"

"Have you ever thought what you would say if I did?" he persisted.

"That's hardly fair, is it?" she smiled. "Are you proposing to me?"

"I certainly am." Peter leaned forward. "I don't need to tell you that I love you, do I?"

Gay suddenly became pale.

"If you don't mind—" she said, pushing back her chair. Peter leaped to draw it away. For an instant he thought that she seemed giddy and started to put his arm around her, but she motioned him away.

"I'm all right!" she declared. "But, as they say, it *is* a little sudden. Rather knocked me!"

"Gay!" He stepped beside her.

"Isn't that like a man! With Walton probably peeking through the crack!"

"I don't care what he's doing!"

Peter took her firmly by the waist, but Gay gently disengaged herself.

"Not—yet," she said almost unconsciously.

She was his! He seized her hand.

"I can do that, anyhow!"

Together they crossed the hall into the den. Still holding her hand he seated himself beside her on the divan.

"Well?" he said.

To his surprise she withdrew her hand.

"Don't think I'm silly or—or—unappreciative, Peter! Of course, I've known for ages you were fond of me. And you know you do give me a thrill. It isn't that! It isn't the thrill! The thrill is all right!"

"Well, if the thrill is all right, what else is there?"

"Heaps!" she replied. "Heaps and heaps. The thrill only means one thing; it's enough for one thing, I suppose—at least, I've always claimed it was. But marriage, you see, means such a lot more than just that."

"Yes—of course!"

He felt a tremendous pride in her. Straight as a string she was!

"I've thought a lot about marriage. Every girl does, naturally. But it's different from what it used to be, at least by all accounts. It isn't lasting any more. If I marry I want it to last. And the only way that I can see to do that, is to make sure that besides the thrill all the other things are there, too."

"Quite right!" he said.

"And that there aren't any false pretenses."

"There mustn't be."

"About anything!"

"Of course not!"

She smiled appreciatively.

"I'm so glad!" she exclaimed, and her voice had a quiver of excitement in it. "Now me, for instance. I don't want you to have any mistaken ideas about me. I'm not a bit what you think I am!"

Peter laughed.

"I'll take the chance."

She gave him a resentful look.

"But you have no right to do that! Don't you see, unless you know all about me you can't tell whether it will be lasting. You must know not only what I feel about you but what I think about everything!"

Peter reached for her hand again.

"Well, let's have it—all you think about everything!"

"You know I let men kiss me."

"I know one you haven't!"

"And do you know why?" Her voice was sweet.

"I reckon I do."

"But it's worse than that, Peter! A lot worse! Not what I've done—I don't mean that—but what I think. Peter!" She lowered her eyes to her lap. "It's not be-

cause I thought anything else was wrong—it was just because I didn't want to!"

He regarded her with affectionate amusement.

"My dear child," he said, "it doesn't make two straws difference to me *what* you think."

"I've got to tell you, all the same!" she insisted. "Now, in the first place, I don't see any reason why it isn't right for a woman to do whatever a man does. And I don't see any sound reason why they both shouldn't do what they choose, so long as it doesn't hurt anybody else."

"Free love?"

"I don't know the definition of free love. What I mean is, I don't see if a man loves a woman and a woman loves a man enough for them to want to live with each other, why they shouldn't, so long as they understand and are willing to take the consequences. God made them that way. Monogamy didn't exist in the time of the Old Testament. It doesn't seem to me to be so different from any of the other things, like eating or drinking."

"You mean that the relation between the sexes is an economic affair?"

"Exactly—yes!"

"Well," said Peter, "I don't see any particular reason why you shouldn't take that view of it!"

"Do *you?*"

"I'm afraid I don't, but we don't have to quarrel over that."

"Well, now that I've told you, there's nothing for me to bother about! You don't think me foolish to want you to know, Peter? You think, just as I do, that there ought to be absolute frankness between two people who are going to marry?"

"Naturally."

He was beginning to wonder where it was all going to lead. Gay lifted her eyes to his face.

"Is there anything you think *you* ought to tell *me*, Peter?"

He could feel the rush of blood to his cheeks. But what a fool he was! There was nothing to worry about! Hadn't she just given him a clean bill of health?

"No—not in view of—of what you've just said. I—I've been about like other men, I guess. Rather above the average, I should say."

Gay's eyes had narrowed.

"Oh!" she faltered. "Have you known many—women then?"

"No! Three or four, possibly. After all——"

She put her hand to her lips.

"Is there—anybody—now?"

"No."

She got up, walked the length of the room, turned and came back to where he was sitting. He waited nervously, but without actual apprehension. Hadn't he her own word for it?

"It's awfully hard for me to ask you these questions. Please don't think me prying or unreasonable, Peter!"

"I don't, dear!" he assured her. "Ask me anything you wish! I don't blame you for wanting to know these things."

"Very well. These women—were they—prostitutes?"

"A couple of them were."

"A long time ago?"

"Ages ago—when I was just out of college."

Her face indicated relief.

"And the others?"

"There has been only one other."

He could feel the perspiration breaking out along the edge of his forehead.

"Were you in love with her?"

"I suppose I was—in a way—yes, of course I was!—

but not as I am with you, Gay! I have never loved any woman as I love you."

He believed this to be true.

Gay bit her lips. Peter could hear the ticking of the tall clock in the hall outside.

"Is—is this woman—alive?"

He waited before replying.

"Yes," he said at length.

She stepped back.

"You have had—a mistress?"

"I suppose it would be called that," he admitted. "Look here, Gay. I don't quite understand all this. I thought you said it was nobody's business what a man did—or a woman, either, in fact—so long as it didn't hurt anybody else?"

"Exactly. That's what I said. So long as it doesn't hurt anybody else and they are willing to take the consequences."

"Then I don't see——"

"But this does hurt somebody else. It hurts *me!* That's one of the consequences! Oh, Peter!"

She gazed at him piteously. She was very lovely. He could not lose her. He held out his arms.

"I love you! Isn't that enough?"

She swayed toward him, then fended off his approach with closed eyes.

"Oh, what shall I do! What shall I do!"

"Marry me!" he begged. "After all, what's past is over and done with."

"That's the trouble! One never knows! So long as the woman is still alive!"

"We have separated. Everything is over between us, Gay! For pity's sake don't let this——"

"When did you leave her?"

"Before I met you."

"A—lady?"

"Most assuredly!"

Curiosity burned in her eyes.

"Do I—*know* her?"

"You mustn't ask me any more questions. I've told you too much already. I've no right to say anything from which you might infer who she is. What she has done is her own affair. In your own words, it's nobody's business but her own."

"But you are asking me to marry you, Peter! Don't you see that unless you tell me who it is I shall suspect every woman you know?"

"If that is so, I can't help it! I love you, Gay! I want you to be my wife. Whether it's wise or not—and I've serious doubts on that subject—I've told you everything there is about myself. These post-mortems never get anywhere. As for her, you've no right to ask who she is."

Peter did not doubt his love for the girl before him, nor suspect that he had merely transferred his love from Ursula to Gay, in whom it had been unconsciously perpetuated and even intensified. Otherwise he would have paused at the flood of memories loosed by his own words. For an instant he saw Ursula where Gay was standing; then Ursula became Gay again. He took another step toward her and again held out his arms.

"Don't chuck me—for this, Gay! Please—for God's sake, don't be so hard on me! After all, I've told you the whole story! Remember, I love you! That's the main thing! That's everything, isn't it?"

She had sunk down into a chair and was weeping silently without looking at him.

"The awful part of it is," she sobbed, "that I love you, too!"

He was beside her instantly. Bending over, he kissed her hair and then tried to lift her hands from her eyes.

"Then marry me, Gay! Marry me!"

She suffered his caress for a moment. Then she arose. With a tearful smile she held out her hand.

"I must think it over," she said. "Good-night, Peter dear! Poor old Peter!"

CHAPTER XXIII

ENID awoke the morning after her visit to the "Follies" with a restored sense of security. By daylight the fears engendered by the attitude of Mrs. Thayne seemed exaggerated. New York was big enough for everybody, and there was no reason to suppose that the old cat had recognized her, anyway. Carter called up cheerily at noon, and she answered him from among her pillows. He had heard of a play that everybody said was a scream. The afternoon she spent with a deferential young man with brilliantine on his hair, from a smart real-estate office. She and Carter dined at a chic Russian restaurant with subdued lights and a balalaika orchestra, and afterward took in the "scream"—a risqué French bedroom farce. More champagne. The next day was much the same—and the next. Automatically she fell into a routine.

The mornings she spent in bed, the afternoons with the brilliantine, who on the third occasion invited her to have tea with him at the Casino. As yet she had called nobody up. There had been more in the papers than she expected. She did not want to see Gay; Babs and Carlo had gone back to school. It was better to lie low until she could receive in her own home. Surrounded by the luxury of the Croyon she conceived herself as safely hidden from the public gaze, but in fact she was no more protected than if she were a fish in an aquarium. The enamelled smartness of her overdressed existence hardened the protective armor which was hers by nature. It also blinded her. She saw no reason to be discouraged. Everybody she saw seemed to be in process of getting away successfully with something.

So swift had been her metamorphosis that she did not recognize herself as a lost soul. She was not aware that she had died and was living in another world. The breath of scandal that had withered her reputation overnight had been like an unexpected burst of flame leaping forth from the open door of a blast furnace. Her social extinction had been so nearly instantaneous as to be practically painless.

She had strolled into Strendel's one morning—more for something to do than for any other reason, since her trousseau had long since been bought—when she saw her friend Mrs. Ballington trying on a hat.

"How do you do, Maud!" she said, in that quiet yet cordial tone she had always found so effective. Mrs. Ballington looked up enthusiastically, saw who it was and tried to hold the expression.

"Oh! How do you do!" she said vaguely. Then, to cover her confusion, she added: "I was just looking at a hat!"

"So I see," replied Enid. "One usually does here, doesn't one!"

Mrs. Ballington moved imperceptibly away.

"Yes, of course," she murmured. "I don't think I like it much after all!" she said, handing the hat to the *vendeuse*. "Good-morning!" She moved her head slightly, as if to include Enid, and hurried out.

"She actually had the audacity to try to cut me!" she told Carter at dinner. "But she's the only person in New York who has!"

Enid failed to perceive that this was because she was not really in New York but in Paris, living in that fourth dimension known as "hotel life." The Croyon had the same suave managers, the same waiters, the same blonde *vestières* in the cloak-room, the same food, and the same

guests as similar hostelries the world over, where everybody is in the best society because there is no other, the members of which go on moving around the world forever, enjoying a luxurious immortality in what is happily known as "a chain" of just such "*hôtels royals et splendides.*"

Then suddenly she realized that she was bored—bored as she had never imagined it possible to be—bored with everything about the life she was leading—the rich, overelaborate food, the never-ending saxophonic music, the swank, the dearth of any one to talk to, the uninterrupted succession of evenings at the theatre—and most of all with the man with whom she had doomed herself to live.

Blair's rooms were directly across the hall, but he seemed to regard even that slight separation as a rather pusillanimous concession to convention. Her first gesture of protest he had disregarded. Did she think him a wooden Indian? Anyhow, she was hardly in a position to refuse his demands when she was letting him pay her bills. She had not surrendered without calculation; he would be more likely to stick if anything went wrong, she thought, if he knew her full attraction. But the fact of having yielded to him gave her at times a sickening feeling. At any rate, it was done—and already her distaste for him was greater than her distaste for Charles. Why could she not have been endowed with a passion equal to her allure?

Yet she did not dare antagonize him by setting a limit to his concupiscence. He must have no chance to cool until they were legally married. Should he become bored with her, as she was with him, he might throw her over even now. She must act quickly, while he was in the toils.

Blair made no attempt to evade the obligation, although seeing, as he said, no reason for making a "towse" over the affair. He was for slipping away quietly and getting married without any fuss. But Enid insisted upon a church wedding. St. Timothy's was her church and she wished to be married there. A church wedding would be in the nature of a public vindication. She knew that the church opposed the remarriage of any divorced person save the innocent party in a divorce for adultery, and she now thanked her stars that, under the new French rule, she had been required to make the allegation of infidelity against Charles. What had seemed an ill wind at the time had carried a hidden blessing! Otherwise she might have had to be married by an alderman, and that was vulgar. She now looked to Thrum as to an army with banners. But, in spite of Carter's comparatively recent contribution toward the new reredos, they had difficulty in securing an appointment with the rector.

Carter left the whole business to her. He had no use for clergymen, and had rather a contempt for Thrum, to whom he was accustomed to refer as an "ecclesiastical ass." Any of those beggars would absolve you of murder for a few thousand dollars! All Enid need do was to tell Thrum what she wanted and he would do it. Wasn't Thrum,—having acted as a sort of chaperon on *The Astarte*, —*particeps criminis*, as it were? But Enid insisted that he should go with her to the rector's study in the parish building, on his way down-town next morning.

"I wouldn't smoke in here, Carter!" she said, as they entered the monastic-looking office, with its white walls, straw carpet, and oiled oak furniture.

"Nonsense!" he returned. "Thrum smokes like a furnace. There's a cuspidor over in the corner We'll try

him, anyway!" And he laid a cigar on the rector's blotter.

"I wish you would occasionally do as I ask!" she retorted sharply, and he was conscious for the first time of how small her mouth was.

"Dammit, Enid!—" he began, but just then the rector came in and he changed it to "Oh, hello Thrum, old man! How are you?"

Enid was surprised at the difference the summer seemed to have made in the rector's manner and appearance. She had always thought of him as blandly ingratiating—servile, almost, if he were looking for money—a practical clergyman who loved the good things of life and knew the frailty of human nature. But as he entered, gravely courteous, he struck her as having a new dignity, as being less rubicund—less worldly.

Mr. Thrum shook hands with them both, sat down at his desk, noticed the cigar, laid it to one side, and, locking his hands, leaned back in his chair and said rather drily: "Well?"

"You don't object to my smoking, do you?" remarked Carter, rather patronizingly, as a concession to Enid.

The rector of St. Timothy's gave a non-committal gesture.

"As you like."

His formality, in view of their past acquaintance, made Enid uneasy.

"As you probably know, Mr. Blair and I are planning to be married," she said hastily. "We hope that you will perform the ceremony."

She smiled. A line of pink showed itself above the rector's choker.

"Of course, it would be foolish for me to pretend that I have not heard of your divorce, Mrs. Kent," he an-

swered stiffly. "And it would be equally absurd for me to assume that you are unfamiliar with the Church's attitude in regard to the remarriage of divorced persons——"

"In which I devoutly share!" interpolated Enid with emphasis.

"I should naturally be glad to be of service, but, of course, in the present instance it is quite impossible," he continued coldly.

"'Impossible'?" scowled Blair. "Nonsense! Why?"

"Because the Church forbids the remarriage of a divorced person."

"But that doesn't apply to the innocent party in a divorce for infidelity," answered Enid. "That was the only reason I was willing to make such a charge," she lied glibly. "I would much rather have accused Charles of desertion or something like that. I'm right, am I not?"

"When did you secure your decree?"

"Nearly a month ago."

"It seems to me, if I may say so—that you have assumed a great deal," he replied. "In the first place, the mere fact that you have secured a decree of divorce for adultery—if that is the case—does not of itself give you the right to remarry. The Canon is explicit."

The rector took from an adjacent rack a book bound in black.

"You are correct in assuming that Section Three of Canon Forty-two, to which you refer, makes an exception in the case of the innocent party in a divorce for adultery, to the general prohibition that no minister of the Protestant Episcopal Church shall—I quote—'solemnize the marriage of any person who has been or is the husband or the wife of any other person then living,

from whom he or she has been divorced for any cause arising after marriage.' It expressly provides, however, that, before the application for such remarriage, a period of not less than one year must have elapsed after the granting of the divorce, and that the entire record of the case, including the decree, must have been laid before the Ecclesiastical Authority, who, having taken legal advice, shall declare in writing that the case comes within the exception of the Canon."

"What is this 'ecclesiastical authority'?" inquired Blair contemptuously, tossing the ash of his cigar into the empty grate.

"In this instance the Bishop of the Diocese," replied Mr. Thrum.

"Bunk! I can get a hundred clergymen to marry us!"

The rector of St. Timothy's put the book back in its place in the rack.

"Whatever position the Bishop might eventually take about the propriety of Mrs. Kent's remarrying, you seem to have overlooked the fact that you are yourself a divorced person, and that consequently, while your former wife remains alive—and probably under any circumstances—the Church would not solemnize a marriage between you two."

"Bla! Why, all that's ancient history!" exploded Blair. "I'm not even an Episcopalian by rights. I was born a Unitarian. When my wife divorced me in Arizona ten years ago, we arranged to have the decree expressly provide for the remarriage of either party at any time. I don't care two straws who performs the ceremony."

"That is entirely irrelevant!"

"Do you say that the Church won't recognize the laws of Arizona?"

"The Church refuses to lend itself to any practice it regards as contrary to the teachings of Christ!" returned Thrum.

Enid had become the color of cheese. The rector turned to her abruptly.

"Perhaps I should not say this but,—since we have got thus far,—quite apart from the prohibition of the Canon, the suggestion that I should perform a marriage ceremony between you, a divorced woman, and Mr. Blair, a divorced man, when the same woman appeared as co-respondent in both cases, is morally shocking! No clergyman of any denomination, who had the slightest respect for his cloth, would entertain it for an instant."

"Hold on there!" Blair glared at him.

Thrum returned his gaze sternly.

"I am addressing one of my parishioners!" he said. "There is one thing more I should say to you, Mrs. Kent. Should you take the step you now contemplate, you cannot hereafter receive the Holy Communion. I hope you will not feel hurt at my mentioning this. I do so only because you seem to be uninformed upon these matters. The Canon expressly prohibits the administration of the Sacrament to one married otherwise than according to the Word of God."

He stood up, and his ordinarily insignificant person took on the dignity conferred by two thousand years of authority. He was no longer Thrum; he was the Church.

"Let me speak plainly to you as a sister in Christ. You are contemplating what in the eyes of God is a carnal sin. As your friend, I beg you to refrain from it; as your pastor, I forbid you."

Blair had likewise arisen.

"That's enough!" he cried. "Come along, Enid. There's no use our wasting any more time here!"

His face had become purple under its shock of stiff white hair.

"Let's cut out the cant! We can get along without the Church if the Church can get along without us."

The rector turned his back upon him. Thrum's tone had been one of threatened excommunication. Enid was frightened. On practically every Sunday throughout her life she had reaffirmed her beliefs, and she had never taken any step in defiance of the Church's authority. She looked at Carter hesitatingly. The rector had walked to the window. She could not leave his study in the attitude of a wilful recreant.

"I am sorry. I did not know!" she faltered.

Thrum wheeled.

"You were fully aware when you entered this room that you had divorced your husband for committing adultery with the same woman with whom this man, to whom you now ask me to marry you, had committed it. There may be no law, civil or criminal, to cover such a case, but the mere possibility of your contemplating such a step shows a lamentable absence of moral sense. I shall be glad to talk to you further, should you care to have me do so—but in private. Just now I must ask to be excused. I have engagements——"

. . . . . .

"Why did you grovel to that fat hypocrite!" demanded Blair in the motor. "Let's go down to City Hall, get a license, and be done with it."

"And not be married in Church?"

Enid's tone was startled.

"Why not? Who gives a damn how we're married?"

From where she sat Enid could see the spires of no less than five churches, including that of the Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Paul.

"I—I want to be married in the regular way—by a clergyman of my own faith, if possible." Her voice was weak. Carter grunted. What cowards women were when they came under the influence of priests! A policeman on the crossing lifted his hand. The line of motors stopped short. "No—*no!*" he said paternally, looking through the window at Blair.

"If you want to wait a year—! But then there's that other thing—not that I see anything in it!"

The policeman waved them along. The car started again. Where were they going?

"We must take time to think!"

"If you expect to get married, there's no time like the present." He turned savagely. "It's your own fault. This business about that Myrtle woman would never have come up—Thrum would never have heard of it—if you hadn't gone blabbing your private affairs all over the steamer!"

"I did nothing of the kind."

He laughed derisively.

"How about that precious cigarette case?"

"I'm not to blame if it was stolen from me!"

"Bah!" he retorted rudely. "You ought to have had more sense! You must admit that you were, so to speak, a bit previous."

His manner frightened her. Suppose he took it into his head to chuck her!

"Would you mind opening the window, Carter dear?" she asked in a tone of conciliation, laying her hand on his. "I'm sorry I was cross. I'm—I'm not feeling very well this morning."

Blair did not appear at his accustomed hour, and it was not until nearly six o'clock that she received a brief

telephone message from his secretary to the effect that he had been detained down-town by an important conference that would continue throughout the evening. It was the first time he had failed her, and, synchronizing as it did with the unfortunate occurrences of the morning, it seemed ominous. Was he really busy or was he simply sulking? However, she determined to make the best of it, and, dressing herself with her usual care, she went down alone into the dining-room.

After all, it would be something of a relief to eat by herself. With an unwonted and distinctly agreeable sense of freedom, she selected her table and gave her order with an exhilarating consciousness that every man in the room had given her his tacit approval. Covertly she looked them over, comparing them with her derelict lover. It was rather exciting to be alone like that, to discover that she could still attract. She was pleased when the maître d'hôtel approached and graciously trusted that all was well. He moved from her to the tall Englishman at the next table. How clean-cut they all were! This chap, with his athletic figure, ruddy skin, and sandy hair, might be as old as Carter, yet he did not appear more than thirty-five. She decided it was the waist-line. Why couldn't American business men look like that? They had no class. From time to time she felt his pale-blue scrutiny. She would have welcomed an excuse to have him speak to her. Waiting around that way for Carter had given her the skips. "All dressed up and nowhere to go." She lingered as long as was decent over her coffee, and then, with a bright smile for Adolph, left the dining-room and returned to the apartment, where she sat alone, awaiting Blair's return, and encouraging herself to believe that it had no significance. He came in shortly after ten, and, with nothing to say in ex-

planation of his delinquency, retired soon after to his own rooms.

The next day passed in similar fashion. Blair did not return for dinner, and she was again compelled to eat alone in the dining-room—to have sat up-stairs all by herself would have been too dreary! She was now thoroughly alarmed. Ten o'clock came—ten-thirty. Blair entered as the clock struck eleven, in a palpably ugly mood. She was now terrified lest by some mischance she might so arouse his anger that he would abandon her, and she made use of every artifice at her command to arouse his interest and to decoy his pleasure. In vain. Clearly something serious had happened.

"I'm afraid, dear, you're overworking yourself," she said, pouring out a glass of whiskey for him.

Blair took it without a word and emptied it.

"It's this damn directors' meeting. Brookfield called for a special report. I'm over my ears! Sorry to leave you, of course. But it can't be helped."

"When is the meeting?"

"Tuesday. Something's in the wind! I can tell it. Couldn't be possible they'd make trouble—about—about this!" He looked moodily about the room. "I'd like to know what a man's private life has got to do with his business! Nobody asked me how many times I'd been divorced when they offered me the presidency!"

He got up and began pacing the apartment.

"I don't like Brookfield's manner toward me. Damn snob! I suppose it's because your ex-husband is hobnobbing about with the Prince of Wales! How the hell can you mix polo and mining, I want to know? I knew he liked Kent, but I didn't suppose he'd make this *his* quarrel. I don't know that he's going to, of course. But if he should—! I guess Brookfield has had enough little

affairs of his own. He's pretty soft on that vestal virgin, your sister Ursula. I was counting more or less on that to hold him in line in case of trouble."

Enid's interior mechanism turned over. She had never for an instant contemplated the possibility of her marriage with Blair affecting his career.

"I—perhaps that's the reason he's acting disagreeably," she faltered. "I had rather an unpleasant time with her in Paris."

"With *Ursula!*"

"Yes—she got nasty about Charles and I had to hand her a piece of my mind." She gave a grating laugh. "Incidentally, the lady you have just referred to as a virgin confessed to me that she had had a lover!"

"The devil she did!"

Blair's expression was a mixture of incredulity and triumph.

"Guess that fixes him all right!"

"Who?"

"Brookfield—he's the fellow making all the trouble."

"But how does that help?"

Blair took her by the shoulders.

"Plain enough, isn't it? He's in no position to kick! The pot can't call the kettle black. People who live in glass houses, you know, mustn't throw stones!"

CHAPTER XXIV

After a week at the Lido and another at Cortina d'Ampezzo, Ursula motored back to Paris with her friends the Kaynes. She had gained no peace of mind by her change of altitude. On the contrary, every day that she spent in Europe increased her impatience to get back to America and rectify what she now recognized as her mistake, before it should be too late. She could not expect Peter to remain faithful to her memory forever. He might even have become interested in some other woman already.

There was no reason why he should not. She had given him no inkling that he was being subjected to any test. The break had been apparently final. She had seemingly cast him off. It would be only natural for him to seek consolation with another. And he would be fully justified! She knew that if he did, it would kill her!

Yet, after all, Peter was only human. She, herself, had taught him to be. He might have become entangled already! Men were apt to do foolish things "on the rebound." The world,—on trans-Atlantic steamers,—was full of ostensibly innocent young girls and crafty widows, lying in wait to ensnare the unwary male. She tried unsuccessfully to smother her apprehensions, but everything about her tended to increase them. Wherever she turned she saw pairs of lovers. They were simply everywhere! Suppose, after all her sacrifices and suffering, Peter should fall for some young schemer who would end by making his life miserable.

She had set the time of his probation at three months. But she now perceived that the length of the period was

entirely arbitrary. Six weeks had already gone by. Why three months rather than two? She had subjected him to all the test necessary. He had had plenty of chance to get out of it if he wanted to. Instead, he had proved his devotion by following her abroad—where she had rebuffed him without reason.

By the time they had reached Paris she had worried herself sick lest she might already have lost Peter forever. If only he did not marry——!

As they drove to the France et Choiseul the streets had never seemed gayer, the crowds on the boulevards more care-free. Were they to be regarded as children of darkness for grasping their happiness as it came and hanging on to it? Why had she not clung to hers?

The bearded concierge greeted her almost affectionately. It was a great pleasure to have Mademoiselle with them again. He had not even known where she had gone until he had received her telegram from Cortina ten days ago. Yes, she could have her old room on the court.

Smiling, he conducted her toward the elevator and paused.

"*Ah, oui!*" he mused, finger on temple. "I knew that there was something—!" He retired to the *caisse*. "This letter! It was left here only a few minutes after you departed in July—and because we did not know where you had gone, it has been here ever since!"

At the first sight of Peter's handwriting, even before she had torn open the envelope, she realized that any doubts she might have had about the nature of his love for her—doubts generated by the various and unusual emotional phases of their relationship—had vanished. Love her? Of course he loved her! There had never been such a lover as Peter! Could any one have been more devoted, considerate, and true! How silly she had

been to question even for his own sake the quality or permanency of an affection like his. It had been wrong to trifle with such a love as theirs had been—and was!

Even supposing that for a fleeting instant he had hesitated between her and the anæmic vision of his youthful dreams, what was there that a younger woman could offer that she could not give him a thousand times over? He needed her! She had seen his development going on before her very eyes! She knew his rare qualities as no one else did. Under her encouragement and guidance he might easily become one of the great men of the country. And, as for herself, she knew that no woman had ever loved a man more than she loved Peter. Nothing should keep them apart. From now on no doubt or question should ever come between them again. She would go back and, when he renewed his offer of marriage, as of course he would,—the same insistent, imperative demand that he had incorporated in his letter,—she would marry him!

Somewnat to the surprise of the Kaynes, Ursula took the first ship that touched in France after her arrival in Paris, which happened to be the *Mauretania*. The steamer could not be too swift to bear her to her beloved! She did not feel insignificant any longer. On the contrary, she seemed to herself to be a very important person in view of what she meant to Peter McKay. She had been tempted at first to cable him to meet her, but had thought better of it. A dock was no place for explanations, and so much might turn upon their first interview. It would be much better, she decided, to go at once to "Folly Farm" and telephone him from there. They should meet where they had parted.

Mr. Timmins, that alcoholic relic of equestrianism,

was the only person in sight, except the station agent, when she got out at the shabby wooden platform.

"Glad to see y' back, Miss Weybridge!" he wheezed as he took her bags and led the way to the flivver. "No —ain't much happened since you went away. Made a kind of flyin' trip, didn't ye?"

He chirruped from force of habit as he pushed the self-starter.

Ursula settled herself happily on the rear seat. She was delighted to see Mr. Timmins again—almost as much as she was to be bouncing along the dusty road with its faded hedges, its whitened herbage interspersed with goldenrod and wild asters, toward the farm. Her home! Hers and Peter's! Mr. Timmins was part of the picture, just as was every swaybacked, weathered barn, every little duck-pond with its whorls of green slime, every dried-up brook, every field littered with withered corn-stalks and shrivelled cabbage leaves. How good to be back in one's own land—to listen to Mr. Timmins' flat Nassau County drawl, hear the insistent shrilling of the locusts; to smell the heavy wayside odors, and feel the humid Long Island heat searing her cheeks!

"Trip seems to have done y' good!" said Mr. Timmins, regarding her critically as he pulled up in front of the house. "Whoa there!—Yes, sixty-five cents!"

Nora welcomed her at the door.

"You're lookin' just too lovely, Miss Ursula!"

"It's getting home, I guess," answered her mistress. Or maybe my new hat."

She knew that it was neither. Simply the fact that she had reduced the span between Peter and herself from three thousand miles to thirty. Inversely to the square of that distance the song in her heart had increased its intensity, and now its melody almost drowned her senses

as she looked at the familiar objects of her life with Peter. His chair opposite hers at the dining-room table —he had insisted on having one without arms; the funny little salt "shakers" he was used to and which she had had such difficulty buying for him; the Buhot etching he had placed for her on the mantel one evening and which she hadn't noticed until the salad. Dear Peter!

Reluctant to surrender the memory of their pleasant meals together, she turned back to the drawing-room. Here again everything spoke of him. It was as if he had just left it or, indeed, had only gone out for a moment. The table beside the lamp was where he had shoved it. On it was "The Martyrdom of Man"! The silver cigarette box still held some of the cheap cigarettes he habitually smoked. Lighting one, she almost evoked his presence. Involuntarily she looked out into the hall to see if his hat were on the table. Well, it soon would be! If she called him on the telephone at once he could easily get to her by dinner-time.

"Is the guest-room ready?" she asked Nora.

"Oh, yes, Miss! There's still some of Mr. McKay's things in the bottom drawer of the bureau."

"That's all right. Leave them there," said Ursula.

But Peter was not at his office, and, to her disappointment, she learned from the operator that he had gone to Schenectady and would not return until the next day. Was there any message?—it might be possible to reach him through the Ten Eyck at Albany. No, she would wait. His first knowledge of her return must come from her own lips. She was crazy to ask the girl at the other end of the wire whether he was well and how he was looking. Her eagerness to get in touch with Peter had driven everything else from her mind, but she now called up

"The Mews." She could find out all about him from Charles.

Gay answered.

"Ursula! Where did you drop from? Oh, I'm fine! So are all of us, including Dad—!" Her niece's usually well-modulated voice struck her as high and excited. "Are you really here for good, Ursula? I'll come right over after lunch! I'm so glad you're back! I've something very special I want to see you about! No, I'm not engaged—yet!"

Ursula assured her that she had no intention of going away again as long as she lived. No mention of Enid! Everything fine! So Gay's love affair was coming to a head at last. The sooner a girl like Gay married and settled down the better. Of course, it was a gamble, but the game was worth the candle. The thought of the possibility of a double wedding occurred to her. No, it was too close in point of time to Enid's escapade. She and Peter would just slip off quietly——.

Gay roared up the hill at half after two and threw her arms around Ursula's neck.

"Oh, Ursula! I'm so glad to see you! Father's been a perfect brick! All the same, it's really been too dreadful! But don't let's talk about mother! No doubt it's the best thing all around." She stepped back and looked over her aunt approvingly. "You're simply wonderful, Ursula!"

"And so are you, my dear! I've missed you beyond words, Gay! Come inside out of the heat! We've so much to talk over!"

With their arms about one another, like two sisters, they entered the drawing-room and instinctively paused before the mirror.

"We are alike, aren't we!" exclaimed Gay. Ursula had

never been more struck by their resemblance. Surely her love for Peter had kept her young! Just as Gay's for Jimmy had probably matured her! That the girl was at last really in love made Ursula unusually tender toward her. She understood so well how the child must feel! No wonder that she was agitated! But was this love or hysteria? Was a person essentially as cool and untouched by emotion as Gay, one as immature in her insensitiveness, as frankly sure of the power of her physical attraction without understanding its significance, and, with all her assurance, as ignorant of life, ready for the ordeal of marriage? Would it last? Was it fair to either of them?

"Have you got a surprise for me?"

"I want to ask your advice, if you'll give it to me, Ursula."

It pleased Ursula that Gay should thus come to her with a renewal of their old confidential relations immediately upon her return.

"It's yours for the asking, dear. Only you know, Gay, I've not had a vast experience in these matters, either. Still,"—the shadow of a smile lighted her face,—"I think I'd know whether a man was the right sort for you. At any rate," she added modestly, "I might be able to help you—a little."

Ursula seated herself on the couch and reached into the silver box beneath the lamp—Peter's box by right of eminent domain.

"Do I know him?" she asked, striking a match.

"Oh, yes!"

"That makes it easier. I don't believe your problem is a very hard one. Love solves most riddles—or ought to!"

As she pulled Gay down beside her upon the couch, her

eyes were as soft as those of a mother about to listen to her daughter's first confession.

"Do you love him very much, Gay?"

"Of course! He's marvellous, Ursula!"

Ursula laid her cheek against the girl's. It was quivering. Perhaps the child really was in love!

"Then what is the trouble!"

Gay pressed the palms of her hands against her forehead.

"I suppose what I'm going to say will sound rather silly to you after the way I've talked, Ursula. But I'm afraid my theories have gone blooey——"

"What theories, dear?"

"All that sex stuff. You know how I used to talk about kissing? I claimed that what people did was their own affair until they got married and pledged their word to each other. That it wasn't what one had done but what one was that counted. Now I see that what one is depends on what one has been, that the past can't be separated from the present, that it's all a part of the same thing."

Ursula felt her throat contract at the bare thought that, after all, Gay might have strayed too far across the border-line of sex.

The girl smiled ruefully at her aunt's concern.

"Don't worry, it isn't me, Ursula! I almost wish it were. Then I wouldn't have anything to decide."

"Decisions are always trying," said Ursula relieved. "But once they're made——"

Gay's tightly compressed mouth blotted the rouge along her under lip.

"That's the trouble. I'm afraid merely deciding really isn't going to help. I've tried to be reasonable. I've told myself over and over that what's past is past. That if he

loves me—" She burst into an hysterical laugh. "I've said: 'Miss Kent, you can't hope to marry a virgin! You wouldn't want to, if you could. There's no such animal!' But that's not the point!"

The wildness of Gay's manner startled Ursula. What a shame that the child must be disillusioned in this way. No wonder Gay had been surprised and shocked. Jimmy Thorne had always impressed her as being clean as a whistle. She had heard, of course, the current rumors about some of his associates—of apartments rented surreptitiously under assumed names in out-of-the-way districts, of borrowed keys, of occasional blackmail. But all that was out of character with Jimmy. Still——!

"I'm afraid that is too much to hope for, dear," she said. "Every boy——"

"But he's not a boy!" corrected Gay.

"Of course not!" smiled Ursula. "He's a man. And practically every man has some sort of experience like that before he marries."

"Naturally! No one expects an angel! I don't mean —the common thing. That isn't love at all. But I have a hunch this was, and that's what makes me afraid. He might go back to her."

"Do you mean—that he has had a mistress?"

"Yes. He says it's all over now, and if he does, of course, it is. But suppose anything happened; that we didn't get on or something? She would be there—waiting, you see! They say a woman never forgets a man she has loved——"

Ursula mentally repeated the words. "A woman never forgets a man she has loved!" How true she knew that to be! She understood just how Gay felt, but, after all, Jimmy was too young to have had any very serious affair. He might even have lived with some one, but of

necessity it must have been for only a short time. Probably he had thought himself in love. Those things happened. It wasn't fatal. Whatever mistakes he might have made, she felt sure Jimmy was redeemable.

"It must have been a long time ago, when he was a mere boy," said Ursula. "Jimmy has been in love with you, to my knowledge, for years."

Gay raised her head quickly.

"But it's not Jimmy!"

"Not Jimmy!" Ursula's voice faded to nothing. "Not Jimmy!" she repeated. Of course there was no particular reason why the man in love with her niece should be Jimmy. He might perfectly well be one of a thousand others. Yet the declaration contained premonition. "Who is it, then?" she asked faintly.

"Peter—Peter McKay."

Ursula clutched the arm of the couch. She would not faint. She would not!

"—wonderful!" she heard—"simply adorable!—so happy!" The mist was clearing, but she felt physically ill. Water! She must have water! She pressed the bell at her side.

Now that Gay had disclosed her lover's identity she seemed to speak much more easily.

"Did you ring, Miss?"

"Some ice-water, Nora. Or would you rather have lemonade, Gay?"

"Nothing, thanks."

Gay reached for a cigarette.

"Well, that's the terrible story! The eternal triangle! You must advise me, Ursula. I haven't any one else to go to, you know! Theoretically, I suppose I ought not to care, but practically, I can't bear the thought of his ever having loved any one else!"

For an instant Ursula's nature seemed to have shrivelled into something hard and sharp, something that she could have driven red-hot into the girl beside her, as the ghastly spectre of a faithless Peter stalked through the room. Nora came with the ice-water. The frosty glass in Ursula's hand revived her, and she sipped for a time; letting the pieces of burning ice rest against her frozen lips. The interval grew too long, and to break it she removed the glass and said:

"Mr. McKay is a good deal older than you, isn't he?"

Gay tossed her cigarette into the fireplace.

"Oh, not much! Twelve years, about. I don't mind that. I like him all the better. I'm tired of boys. I've never known anybody I admired so much. It's only this horrible doubt! He says I've no right to ask who the woman is, for that would involve disloyalty to her. But the very idea that he has to be loyal to another woman almost drives me mad."

"And you have no suspicion who it is?"

"Not the faintest! You see, he's lived in so many different places in all parts of the world. I might even never see her. But I'd suspect every woman he'd ever known before he came here from Oxide. I do love him so! And that's the only thing between us—between me and happiness!"

She looked heartrendingly pretty as she said it. No wonder Peter had fallen in love with her.

"Do you think me a rotten little coward, Ursula? Do you think if I loved him I ought to care?"

"Do you think that if you *do* care, you can really love him?"

"I do love him!" declared Gay passionately.

Ursula got up and walked to the window. It had hap-

pened! She had lost him forever. She clung tightly to the curtain, trying to think, seeing nothing. Peter in love with Gay? It was not surprising that Peter should have been attracted by her. She was frankly what he had been looking for. But Gay—that hard, unawakened little thing! What could she know of love! Was her feeling for Peter anything deeper than the selfish satisfaction derived from the discovery that she could attract an older man? Was it not magnified by an artificial haze of romance? Could Gay, by any possibility imaginable, ever love Peter half as much as she did? Or be to him a tenth of what she could be? And Peter—? Did he have any conception of what Gay was really like? Did he know either her faults or her virtues? Or had he merely fallen in love with a pretty face and invested her with the qualities which he wished to see in her? In fine, was either he in love with her or she with him? Who could tell?

But why should not Gay make a good wife for Peter? Was he not right in wishing to marry a woman sure to bear him children? Gay was young, healthy, pretty, amusing, intelligent, and she was honest and loyal. Was she justified in weighing against these admirable attributes the girl's boldness, wilfulness, intolerance, and selfishness? Perhaps these qualities would all disappear. There was all the more chance that such a marriage would be a success by very reason of the disparity in their ages. If anybody could control Gay's rebelliousness it would be a man like Peter. Were not her chances with Peter better than with Jimmy Thorne?

Was she—an interested party—to be the judge of their sincerity or the depth of their affection? She had gone away in order to give Peter a free hand. Was her going, then, a meaningless manœuvre? She might have hoped

that time would prove her wrong, but she could not quarrel with the fact that it had proved her right!

She must play out the game. After all, Gay was young, while she—! She pulled the curtain about her face.

Gay arose and crossed the room to where her aunt stood.

"What's the matter, Ursula? Everything's all right! I can stand it no matter what you advise!"

The girl's calm tones restored Ursula's self-control. Lifting her head, she took Gay in her arms and kissed her.

"Don't throw your chance of happiness away for any foolish idea!—As I did!" she added to herself.

"Then you'd marry him in spite of everything!"

"If you love Peter McKay and you are sure that he loves you more than any other woman—then marry him. But I would be *sure!*"

"I *am* sure! Absolutely! Oh, Ursula! You've made me so happy!"

"I hope you always will be," said Ursula, kissing her again. Suddenly she felt too weak to stand.

Gay took another cigarette.

"Dromedaries!" she remarked, examining it. "What Peter smokes. They're not so bad. I used to like only 'Luckies,' but I'm getting quite used to these now. I've learned lots of things from Peter! Do you know him at all well, Ursula? I didn't meet him for the longest time! He was the general manager out at Oxide, you know, and they brought him East as a sort of understudy to Carter Blair. Don't you think he's terribly good-looking? So dark and serious! And I love that scar on his chin! Did you know he had one? An Indian shot him!" She paused to light the "Dromedary." "You see, he got here just a few days before I went off on that fatal cruise

on *The Astarte.* So I didn't meet him then, and as soon as we got back old papa Thorne grabbed me and took me to the 'Restigouche.' I was up there a fortnight, and when I returned from Canada Peter had gone abroad on his vacation. It was like a game of hide and seek, wasn't it? And all that time neither of us suspected that the other existed! Isn't life strange? I'd never even heard of him, so far as I remember. Dad merely said one morning: 'I've asked McKay, our general manager, to visit us for a couple of weeks. He'll be down this afternoon!' My heart sank. You know what some of these woolly Westerners are like. I expected some sort of a great roughneck. Instead I got—Peter!—Gosh!"

She threw herself on the chaise longue and twiddled her feet.

"Ain't life grand! It was a genuine case of love at first sight—really! I'd gone to meet them in the roadster and I was delayed, and he and father were waiting for me on the back platform. I saw this tall, very handsome, well-dressed man talking to dad, and my heart went pitter-pat! I never guessed he was my roughneck—until dad introduced him. It was all over after the first flash! I don't mean I just fell for him physically, although I think he's one of the best-built men I ever saw. He almays makes me think of a statue by Praxiteles! We have such a wonderful companionship together, and he's read so much, Ursula. And he loves poetry—especially Yeats. There's hardly any subject he isn't familiar with. And of course he's lived all over the world and knows all sorts of people. Our tastes are alike, too. He loves out-of-door things just as I do—nature and all that. It's too marvellous! And he'd be perfectly at home in any sort of society. I'm sure any woman who got the chance would fall for him." She stopped suddenly. "I can't

blame him for being attractive, can I? It didn't take me ten minutes to know he was the nicest man I'd ever met, although we were terribly snorty to one another at first. I tried to vamp him and he treated me like the fresh kid I was. I just simply adored him. But I nearly died for fear he'd think I really was a cheap skate—and then we had a most wonderful talk down on the point—and everything went like greased paint! I'm so happy, Ursula! And you're so sweet to encourage me! Are they doing the Charleston in Paris? I'm taking lessons of Ned Wayburn."

She threw her cigarette into the fireplace and gave a demonstration.

"Of course it's hard, but everybody will be doing it before long. I'm so *lame* in the morning! Well, I've got to beat it!" She kissed Ursula good-bye. "Babs and Carlo have a lot of wild animals coming to lunch and I have to feed them! So long! And thanks a lot!"

She ran out. The slam of the roadster's door was followed by the whirr of the self-starter. The klaxon's scream seemed her own, as Ursula sat rigid, her clenched fists on her knees.

CHAPTER XXV

SITTING about Vincent Pepperill's patined table in Washington Square, with the cloth removed and the port moving in the right direction,—both horizontally and vertically,—the unseen powers had discussed the case of Carter Blair. Had they discussed it elsewhere, the result of their deliberations might have been different, for save in Washington Square Mr. Pepperill would have been an anachronism. Both he and his house would have fitted far better into Grosvenor Square, London, than into upper Fifth Avenue, where, indeed, they would not have fitted at all. He was dapper, bird-like in his movements, condescending, with pale-blue eyes, to the world at large, patronizing to wealthy clients, and wore a tall hat—an aristocrat of the old school, as demonstrated by the fact that he suffered from gout. In fine, he bore no resemblance to the modern "corporation lawyer."

He was by direct inheritance counsel to the great banking house of Graham & Company, the Mid-West Coal Company, the Graham Foundation, and the Calizona Copper Company. A connoisseur of note, his house was filled with priceless ceramics and other treasures of art as fragile as himself and as heavily insured. He was a firm believer in the capitalistic system, the Republican Party, the Protestant Episcopal Church in America,—in just that order,—and in the value of clean linen.

Crutchfield & Pepperill, of which he was the surviving partner, had been the leading firm on Wall Street in the period when lawyers were lawyers. In their vaults reposed the wills of such members of the older New York families as still occupied pews in Grace and Trinity, and

held the original stock of the parent banking concerns from whose loins had sprung the present mammoth trust companies. "Crutchfield & Pepperill," in the shape of Vincent Pepperill, had drawn those wills, and in due course would execute the testators' wishes—as he interpreted them. On Mr. Pepperill's interpretation hung the policy of many a great financial and philanthropic institution, and since that interpretation was largely affected by the state of the old lawyer's health, it would be difficult to over-estimate the influence of Mr. Pepperill's gout upon the public weal. Which may be nothing more than to assert that man crawls toward the millennium upon his stomach, and that the way to happiness is the alimentary canal.

"You say the fellow had the nerve to ask you to marry them?" he now remarked, scrunching a walnut as, if necessary, he might have a human skull, and taking a sip of port. "Incredible! I never realized he was a fool!"

Brookfield, at the other end of the table, shook his head.

"Not that, sir! In love, perhaps! It blinds people, they say—for any sort of game."

Thrum, no longer priest, but friar, peered pinkly over a walnut-shell through his bifocals.

"Love? Rubbish!"

"Exactly," said Mr. Pepperill. "Tobacco, Podley!"—and as the guardsman-butler followed the port, bearing the sacred box—"Mr. Graham brought these to me from Cuba two years ago."

He looked through the candles. The memory of the old friend and client, who had dropped dead of heart-failure at a meeting of the Mid-West Coal Company the winter before, was very dear to him. The other gentlemen helped themselves reverently from the ark of the cove-

nant. Thornton Graham had been their fellow-director on the Calizona, now succeeded by his son, the blue-eyed John.

"I don't see how even in his wildest dreams he could have imagined—" began Brookfield.

"That I would marry them?" The Reverend Thrum threw back his head and thrust his hands into the pockets of his ecclesiastical trousers. "It's not at all surprising to me, Mr. Brookfield. Fellows like that are uninformed. They're ignorant of everything outside their own business. In fact, I don't suppose he thought about himself in the matter at all." Thrum chuckled into his glass of port. "He seemed to think that the fact he had been a Unitarian took him out of my jurisdiction."

"Probably forgot he'd ever been divorced—or married, either!" agreed Brookfield. "Still, Blair's a good executive, and in many ways not a bad fellow. He's made a lot of money for us. The question is what we are going to do. What do you think, John?"

"I think we ought to get rid of him," replied Graham. "This sort of thing is bound to hurt our credit. You remember how the stock of the Cottonseed National dropped after the Halloway scandal."

A square-faced, heavy-jowled man opposite puffed out his cheeks doubtfully. He resented what he regarded as the arrogance of riches.

"Isn't your feeling somewhat exaggerated, Mr. Graham? Blair is one of the ablest copper men in America. All of us don't feel the same about divorce. That he fell in love with the wife of another officer of the same company was unfortunate, but that sort of thing happens every day. Frankly, I don't believe it will cost the shareholders one cent. It can't affect our output——"

"I beg your pardon!" interrupted Graham. "Nothing

is as sensitive as the money market, Mr. Duer. Officers of big companies have to walk straight these days. The credit-man's eye, if Mr. Thrum will excuse the paraphrase, is in every place, beholding the evil and the good."

Mr. Duer looked significantly at Graham.

"I trust that you are not influenced by a natural desire to retain your friend, Mr. Kent. After all, he has resigned. The question of whether his resignation should be accepted should be considered quite apart from that of retaining Mr. Blair, who has worked hard for us for many years. We have no one to put in his place. I for one should hate to see him go."

"Kent is not a particular friend of mine. I'm not considering him in the matter at all. Of course, we couldn't have them staying on together, but if Blair goes there's no reason why Kent shouldn't come back."

"Well, Blair hasn't gone yet," retorted Duer. "You can't fire a valuable man like that right off the bat simply because you don't like the cut of his beard. How do you feel about it, Pepperill?"

Mr. Pepperill stared fixedly at Mr. Duer. He had just been reminded by a twinge in his knee that he should not have taken that last glass of port, and his finely veined waxen-like skin was drawn into a peculiar and ambiguous contortion, intended to deceive those about him into supposing that he was inwardly amused by something, when in fact he was suffering the tortures of the damned.

Mr. Duer, satisfied by the apparent amiability of his expression that Mr. Pepperill was on his side, smilingly awaited his reply. Suddenly the old lawyer's expression changed. He became purple.

"I think he's a roughneck!" he exploded. "We don't want a lobster-palace millionaire representing us!"

Mr. Duer shuddered and reached for his glass of port. It was unfortunate for Carter Blair that Mr. Pepperill was an anachronism, and that he suffered from gout.

The board room was filling up,—they had been using Kent's old office for the meetings since his resignation,—and through the open door Blair could see Vincent Pepperill standing straddled before the fireplace, twirling his eyeglass under the picture of old Sheridan. The man who could overawe a milling mob of striking miners had never felt comfortable with old Pepperill, even on his own yacht! All the same, his private affairs were none of their concern. They would see that he could fight for himself as well as he could for them. But fight how? What? That was the trouble. "My cursed lechery!" he thought, although not in those precise words. "Why in hell did I ever go after that woman?" Well, none of them need talk. If they tried any funny business he would hand them a few plain truths. Lighting a fresh cigar, he took up his report and strode into the next room.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen. How are you, Mr. Pepperill? Chairman here?"

He nodded to the others,—all of whom returned his greeting with what seemed to him unusual cordiality. Perhaps his fears had been groundless. Maybe he had been working too hard, just as Enid had said. The thought of her gave him no pleasure. If he had known what a mess—! Well, no use howling over spilt milk!

They ranged themselves in their customary order—young John Graham, now head of Graham & Company; Jerry Brookfield, elegant and careless; Rufus Kayne, the banker; Bob Morgan, who sat on the board as trustee of his father's estate; Lloyd Maitland, president of the Utopia Trust; Weldon Duer, owner of many copper

mines; and Vincent Pepperill. Giving them the once-over, Blair wondered what he had been afraid of. They seemed quite friendly. Yet it struck him that after the first exchange of civilities none of them had looked at him. Any significance in that?

Maitland was in the chair.

"Order, please, gentlemen. Do I hear a motion to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the last meeting? Carried. There is no treasurer's report. This brings us to general business. You have all had time to read the president's special report? Yes, Mr. Pepperill!"

The counsel to the corporation tapped his thumb-nail gently with his eyeglass. Benignity personified!

"Mr. Chairman. It seems to me that the first official action taken by our board to-day should be a note of congratulation to our president for his masterly handling of a most delicate situation at the Ajo camp." He smiled in the direction of Carter Blair, who experienced a sudden feeling of warmth for the old lawyer. Pepperill was a good old skate, after all. He'd probably misjudged the whole bunch. He had made a good job of Ajo and it was pleasant to know that his efforts had been appreciated. Everything was all right.

"Hear! Hear!"

"I have read Mr. Blair's report and I am greatly impressed. I shall be glad to second the motion," said John Graham, whose family holdings represented over thirty per cent of the entire capital stock.

The chairman nodded.

"You have heard the motion, gentlemen, that our president be congratulated upon his excellent work at Ajo. All in favor! Carried! I congratulate you, Mr. President!"

"Thank you, gentlemen! Thank you very much!"

Blair half rose from his seat and bowed. He had not expected the board to do anything so graceful. It was very decent of them. Yes, everything was all right!

"What is the next business?" Rufus Kayne speaking.

Mr. Pepperill cleared his throat.

"In view of his unusual experience and ability and the nature of the services rendered and to be rendered by him, I move that the salary attached to the office of president of the Calizona Copper Company be increased from sixty to seventy-five thousand dollars per annum."

Blair was astounded. He'd been off the track altogether! It paid to have these fellows off on your yacht.

"Second the motion," from Morgan. Good old Bob!

The chairman swept the board.

"Any discussion? If not——"

"I simply want to add my word to the general appreciation," said Rufus Kayne. "I approve the increase!"

"You have heard the motion—to raise the president's salary to seventy-five thousand dollars per annum? All in favor—contrary minded—unanimously carried!"

Blair rose to his feet. That was handsome!

"I hardly—know how to thank you, gentlemen! I can only say that I shall do everything I can to earn the salary—anything—any time—anywhere—" He waved generally and sat down.

There was a noticeable pause.

"Any further business? Mr. Pepperill."

For the first time that afternoon Blair caught the lawyer's eye. Was it twinkling?

"Mr. Chairman and members of the board. The Calizona is the biggest producer of raw copper in the world. It has more invested capital, employs more men, and uses more complicated machinery than any other mining company. In view of the extent and value of our proper-

ties and the immense importance of the labor situation, which our president has shown himself so unusually capable of handling, it seems to me that it is in the West rather than in the East that his services are most needed. I should be glad to have you consider the desirability of moving the corporation's chief executive office to Oxide, which is the strategic point, leaving the direction of our affairs here to a managing vice-president. How do you feel about my suggestion, Mr. Blair?"

Then he understood! The old fox! They were trying to exile him, after baiting the trap with a salary increase of fifteen thousand dollars! He could feel his collar tighten about his neck. Should he tell them all to go to hell? He could, of course! But if he made an issue of it and they accepted his resignation, everybody would say that they had kicked him out! He might not even be able to find another position. He looked along the row of self-conscious faces, seeking to interpret their studied lack of expression. A put-up job, he decided. All that "applesauce"! How he had sucked it in! But they had him!

The chairman was looking at him with an interrogating eye. He must answer something. Should he play for time—smear it up a bit? He could make talk for a month, invent a thousand excuses why they ought to keep him in New York. But, after all, what did he want to live there for? He'd be glad enough to get out of the damn place. And it would be a perfectly good excuse for getting rid of Enid. Already he was irritated beyond expression by her cloying possessiveness. The woman hadn't an atom of passion in her body. A way out!

They were all of them looking at him now. What did they expect? A cold bunch of hard-boiled birds! An ill wind that didn't blow some good!

"I think there is a great deal to be said for Mr. Pepperill's suggestion," he heard himself say. "Of course it

is rather a sudden change, but on the whole it strikes me favorably. We can try it, anyhow. After all, I've spent most of my life in Arizona. And the climate agrees with me!" he finished with a grim laugh.

"What is the general feeling?" inquired Maitland.

"We might try it, as Mr. Blair says," ventured Morgan blandly. "I think we should all feel safer if Mr. Blair was on the firing line."

"In front of it, you mean!" thought Blair.

The chairman glanced at Mr. Pepperill.

"Do you put that in the form of a motion?"

"As the board wishes."

"Is the motion seconded?"

"I second the motion," said Rufus Kayne.

"All in favor—carried. Is there any other business?"

That settled that! Blair had a surprising sense of relief. Until that moment he had not realized the tension he had been through. He'd be glad to get back to Arizona, where he could live like a he-man.

Brookfield fingered the blotter in front of him.

"How about Kent's resignation? We've never acted on it." He peered under his brows at Blair. "Perhaps—if the president has no objection—the board might feel a little freer——"

Blair pushed back his chair.

"I quite understand," he said. "Brookfield's right. I'll get out and avoid embarrassment."

He walked to the door, then turned. For an instant his eye rested on the picture of the horse over the mantel.

"I hope, gentlemen, you'll refuse to accept Kent's resignation. Charlie's all right! I'd be glad to see him back in his old room."

Enid knew intuitively that her future with Carter turned in some way upon what the directors should do,

and she spent the afternoon waiting nervously for the word from the office he had promised to send her. She realized that she had been a fool not to make sure of him that morning after their unfortunate interview with the rector of St. Timothy's. His manner since then had been so different toward her that she had not ventured to mention the subject again. Would she dare to do so now? And suppose—suppose he should refuse! Unless he married her she was hopelessly compromised—and, perhaps, even if he did. Her folly now seemed colossal. Married or unmarried, she was done for without him. Why should he marry her? He had nothing to gain by marriage now. She could no longer assist him in his career—she had reached the point of admitting that.

She paced the floor of her suite, waiting for the telephone to ring, biting her lips and strewing the hearthstone with cigarette tips. She could not live any longer under such uncertainty as to her future. She must know what he proposed to do. As yet he had not even rented an apartment. Why had she not made a greater effort to conciliate? But what more could she have done? Surely the meeting was over by this time!

He had intimated that he might get back in time for tea, but at half-past four, as she had heard nothing from him, she called up his office. Mr. Blair had gone out, his secretary said, shortly after three, and had not come back—very likely he was on his way up-town. But he did not arrive, and at five o'clock she had tea by herself on the balcony of the apartment.

If only some one would drop in to see her! Not one of her old friends had acknowledged her existence. She no longer attempted to deceive herself as to the desperate character of her position. With all her bridges burned behind her, she was at the mercy of a man whom she now all but hated. She pictured herself deserted at the Croyon

with a seven-hundred-dollar suite on her hands. Her own funds were nearly exhausted, for she had relied upon Blair's generosity to replenish her bank account after their marriage. Her marriage! Would it ever take place? What reason had she for thinking that he would marry her? His present actions were certainly not those of a future husband—hardly those of a lover! As the park fell into shadow, darkness gathered about her soul. The sunlight on the elm tops in the Mall made her think of "The Mews." They were having tea on the lawn probably. Was it possible that she would never see it again? Never see Babs and Carlo again! Not even Gay! She held out hopeless arms to her old life.

Home, they said, was where the heart was. But was hers in this rose-tinted Louis Seize salon? In her gray-panelled boudoir? If not, where was it?

Six o'clock—and still no Carter. What could be keeping him? Peering toward the door through the dusk, she listened intently for footsteps outside. He would not come now probably until half-past six—just in time to dress for seven o'clock dinner. She might as well begin her toilette. She switched on the lights and looked at herself in the mirror above the mantel. Could that be she—Enid Kent? Was that haggish, withered face hers? He must not find her looking like that! To-night of all nights she must be at her best, for to-night would decide whether she could hold him or not.

Locking herself in her boudoir, she bathed and prepared to do battle for her life. Teeny had taught her a few good tricks, and ten careful minutes with cold cream, powder-puff and lipstick, and her face had become a marble head-piece on which might well have been inscribed the words: "Beneath this stone lie the mortal remains of Enid Kent."

The result satisfied her. No one could possibly guess

how old she was. The steely blue eyes reflected themselves in shadowy pools, the thin lips pouted in a scarlet kiss.

Spreading out all her new evening gowns upon the bed, she selected a sheath of green-gold from which, when she slipped it on, her shoulders rose like a calla lily. No wrinkles there! She was smooth as cream. Carter never would be able to resist kissing her in that dusky hollow above her left armpit. Where was the cologne bottle? There! She studied herself in the hand-glass, and, fully reassured, selected a handkerchief and unlocked the door.

She had forgotten her fears in the excitement of dressing and her elation at the result. He could come now. She was ready for him. But he had not come! Seven already? He never had been as late as that before without sending her some word. All her anxieties came buzzing back like angry bees. Her throat was dry, and she went to the console and poured herself a drink of whiskey from the bottle and syphon which always stood there. It made her cough, but she felt better for it. After all, he might have been detained. Even if he didn't come in time for dinner, he would be back later, just as on previous nights. She was sick of going to the theatre, anyway.

It was nearly dark now. Could she sit there alone by herself another evening? Rather than do that, she would hire one of those funny old Victorias and go for a drive around the park. The lights called her. So did the music. Stepping once more to the balcony, she looked across the park. Two windows away, standing in a flood of light from the room behind, a man was doing the same thing —the Englishman. He turned and for an instant their eyes met. She looked away, but she could feel his eyes fixed upon her.

A knock on the door! Carter at last! She hurried in-

side and threw it open. "Well—" she began gaily—then, with a sickening sense of doom, took the letter from the bell-boy. She knew what it contained. Her cachet! Swine! He didn't have the courage to face her! She leaned against the mantel. What was the matter with her? She must not throw up the sponge! Bracing herself, she slit the envelope. As she took out the letter, an oblong slip of paper floated to the floor.

DEAR ENID,—

I hardly need tell you what you must have seen already, that there is nothing in this for either of us. The meeting this afternoon put the kibosh on everything. I am to be sent back to Arizona, side-tracked in favor of McKay, who takes my place in New York, and your precious husband is to have his old job. You could never stand the West, and there is no use trying to fool ourselves into thinking that we could be happy together. I am sorry. I shall be glad to be of any service to you at any time, but for the present, at least, I feel it would be better all round if we parted. I have paid the hotel bill up to next Saturday. I take the liberty of enclosing a check——

The crumpled letter fell from her hand, and she leaned heavily against the mantel, staring in horror at the smirking image that leered at her from the glass. She would have smashed the mirror, if by so doing she could have thus destroyed the past—and herself. So he had kicked her out! She bent over and picked up the paper.

Pay to the order of Enid Kent ten thousand dollars.

CARTER BLAIR.

So that was her price! What did he take her for? Her trip to Paris had cost her twice that. He'd probably spent as much on Myrtle Green! And she had called him a sportsman! Her first impulse was to tear the check into fine pieces, but she paused in the act. No use being

hasty! One didn't have to destroy a check in order not to use it. She might even enjoy the gesture of sending it back later. Later?—What would there be later? She might live thirty years yet!

Sentenced for life! Yet she did not want to die, either. What a mess she had made of it all! Could she in three months have lost everything she had in the world! Everything? Her eyes slowly sought the glass again. Reflected behind the white face with its scarlet lips she could see the open window—the lights. From below came the smothered whine of Buckley ("Buck") Wall's jazz orchestra. Folding the check, Enid placed it in her corsage and walked to the balcony. The Englishman had gone. She went into her boudoir, touched her eyebrows lightly with crayon, and repowdered her nose. Then, with a final glance at herself in the big mirror, she opened the door into the corridor, and went down-stairs.

CHAPTER XXVI

To Ursula, after her three months' absence, an almost sepulchral silence enshrouded "Folly Farm." The silver cry of the peepers no longer rose from the marsh at the foot of the orchard; indeed, there was hardly any marsh left. The birds had gone; and now, when she gazed from her window, in place of the oozing lowland, checkered in black and olive, and inundated by a turgid stream, her eyes were met by fields of cracked gray and yellow stubble and a brown line of alders bordering what was little more than a brook. The hillsides were russet instead of green-and-white, and the snowdrift in the orchard had melted entirely away. The bright yellows and reds of spring had faded into the ochres and magentas of early autumn. Nothing moved upon the surface of the ground. The exhausted earth having brought forth, was resting after the struggle of deliverance.

As she walked through the house, she seemed to feel the presence of death there, also—as if something had died in those empty rooms. Could it be that that marvellous and stupendous thing which, never having existed before, had come into being since her birthday, was gone forever? Already it seemed years since then—long years—a lifetime of rapture racked with sorrow. She saw that her life was divided sharply into two parts—before she had met Peter, and afterward. Forty years against four months. Yet in the scale of values the months far outtipped the years. She had lived more in the last hundred days than in all her antecedent existence. Yes, she had lived; she had had the moment that she had asked for! Now it was over. Life was over. Henceforth, for her

there would be no change. Nothing but a meaningless, dull routine. A living death! Yet she had no one to blame but herself. She would search in vain among the ashes for the jewel she had lost! No use calling up Peter now! Was it possible that once again she was to be relegated to a lonely journey "along the downward slope of years"!

Every hour increased that loneliness. Who was there left? In losing Peter she had lost Gay, too. Not that she loved Gay any the less. The child was not to blame. She was glad, of course, that Gay was happy, but the thought of her married to Peter and living at "The Mews," almost next door, would be continual torture. She would move away somewhere. There was nothing to keep her at "Folly Farm" any longer. Even Bessie was gone—Bessie McVane! A letter from the maid had told her that she was at last safely married to her Fergus and living in the ivy-covered cottage at Scourie. And Enid! Poor, misguided Enid! Sometime she would look her up—but not now! Her world absolutely shot to pieces! Nobody left but Charles.

He turned up promptly on learning from Gay of Ursula's arrival, and stayed to dinner, weary but content, looking exceedingly fit, and overjoyed at seeing her again. His Royal Highness, he admitted, was something of a responsibility; but everything connected with the polo matches was going well, and he felt confident that the American team would win. He had foresworn alcohol forever, but she gave him one of the cigars she had selected so carefully for Peter, realizing with a pang that there was no use conserving them.

"Nice place you've got here, my dear!" he said, as his eyes roved over the comfortable chintz furniture and the book-lined walls of the drawing-room. "I suppose one

gets used to living alone. Gay will be leaving me before long, I guess. Oh, there's no secret about it. McKay's been giving her the heaviest sort of a rush for several weeks. I've been expecting to have her come to me most any day now and invoke my parental blessing!"

"I suppose you'll be glad to give it. Peter McKay is—is—" Ursula could not go on.

"There's none better! I've known him for years. The sort of fellow Gay needs. Just enough older than she is —considerate but firm, you know. He's top dog in the Calizona now."

"Isn't Carter Blair still president?"

"Yes, nominally. But the directors have ordered him West—'for the good of the service'—and put McKay in his place here at thirty thousand a year. I understand it's to be permanent. Hard on Enid, isn't it?"

"Poor Enid! Have any of the children seen her since she got back?"

Charles shook his head.

"She has shown no desire to see them, nor they to see her. Of course, Babs and Carlo don't know very much about it, except that she went off and left them, and, anyway, they've gone back to school; but Gay is particularly bitter. It would be funny now if she married Blair's successor—! Odd sort of mix-up, isn't it? If only Enid had met me half-way! Well, I did my best!"

"You have nothing to reproach yourself for, Charles. If Enid goes out West to live it will make it much easier for everybody——"

"It will certainly make it a lot easier for me!" he said. "You've always been such a brick, Ursula! I don't know what Gay would have turned into if it hadn't been for you! She mightn't have been a fit wife for anybody!"

"Gay was always all right!"

"Well, if so, it was due to you—rather than her mother."

His eye caught the silver frame of the photograph of his sister-in-law in court costume, wearing the three feathers, and he took it up and held it under the light.

"I remember when that was taken! It was the year after Enid and I were married. You must have been exactly the age Gay is now. It might be a picture of her. Resemblances are queer things, aren't they? I'm glad she took after you, Ursula! I hope she always stays like you! By the way," he added, as he put back the photograph, "I'm back in the Calizona myself. The board refused to accept my resignation, after holding it up for over three months. Gad, I'll be glad, when I look in through that door, to see Peter there and not Blair——!"

"I'm delighted!" exclaimed Ursula. "Now you can afford to keep 'The Mews.' I hope they raised your salary, too?"

"Yes, by three thou. I'm to get fifteen after this. I might even keep a couple of ponies. Speaking of ponies—have you a seat for the polo matches?"

"I hadn't thought anything about it."

Charles looked anxious. This was a calamity!

"That's too bad! Everything's been sold out for weeks. I'll do my best to find you something. I have to sit in the Prince's box, unfortunately. But McKay bought a box for Gay, and no doubt they can squeeze you in."

Would she never be able to escape the torture of hearing his name? Must she spend the rest of her life shielding her quivering heart from curious eyes? Yes, unless she went away somewhere, abandoned all her old associations and duties!

"Good-night, my dear!" Charles was saying. "I'll see

what I can do about a ticket for you. Don't worry. I'll surely be able to fix you up somehow."

She stood upon the veranda and watched the red gleam of his tail-light shrink to a point and vanish. A thick mist had rolled up from the Sound and wiped out the stars. The night was sooty. She felt rather than saw the trunks of the elms.

Blackness! Nothing but blackness that choked and smothered her! Could it be that only last night she had walked the deck of the *Mauretania* under an arc of stars, watching the halo above the horizon grow and brighten as the liner slipped through the lane of channel buoys—the street-lamps of the ocean?

She had been so exultantly happy! One more sunrise and she would be with Peter! Long Island had been illuminated in honor of her home-coming. The beaded lights strung along the shore of Bay Ridge, the yellow flare of the gas buoys, the red blaze of the beaches, the jewelled fingers of the steamers that pointed across the indigo water—wearing their rubies, emeralds, diamonds—the pale-blue sky, powdered with the pollen of celestial flowers and smouldering along the horizon with the glow of flaming cities; and then, as they moved up the Narrows and dropped anchor off quarantine, Manhattan's incandescent honeycomb of fire—all had been but reflections of the radiance that permeated her entire being.

She had perceived that the idea that Peter could possibly be unfaithful to her had been preposterous—unworthy of herself and of him—something wholly false and consciously manufactured to stimulate her decision to return to America. No great and overpowering love like theirs was anything but eternal. Had she thought that merely by going away she could cause its sacred fire to dwindle and die out for lack of fuel?

Just over there, on the other edge of that iridescent carpet, he had been waiting for her. The night wind that caressed her hair had touched his face. It had blown a message from him to her, the old, old message from every lover to his beloved:

"Doubt thou the stars are fire;
Doubt that the sun doth move;
Doubt truth to be a liar;
But never doubt I love."

Yes, twelve short hours ago her heart had been ready to burst for happiness. Now the future was blacker than the night about her. Must she go on living? What difference to anybody, if she were going away, to what bourn she went? Was it a coward's part to end one's suffering? Suppose one had an incurable disease? Must one linger on in agony just to encourage some other wretch to do the same? She knew that her own malady was incurable. She could never love again.

She turned wearily to re-enter the house. Through the drawing-room window she could see the sofa where Peter and she had so often sat together—where she had sat the evening she had made her plea for happiness. Had she been right? Had she been justified in looking to her heart for her moral code, as she had claimed? She relived all that had happened in that room. A thousand years ago, in another life, it seemed—and yet as if it had transpired that very evening. She could almost see Peter sitting there in the chintz-covered armchair opposite as she read to him from Pater's "Renaissance." The book was still there, lying just where she had laid it down, on the corner of the table under the lamp. Something drew her through the window into the room. Was it all over, then? Her chin quivered, and to stop her tears she bit the fingers of her left hand. Had she made a terrible mistake, after all?

She wiped her eyes, and, taking up the volume, turned to the passage she knew so well. There it was—at the very end:

> . . . We are all *condamnés*, as Victor Hugo says: we are all under sentence of death but with a sort of indefinite reprieve . . . we have an interval, and then our place knows us no more . . . our one chance lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time.

She replaced the book and looked about the room. Well, she had seized her chance for happiness—and this was what it had done to her! Was this her retribution? Had God taken this way to punish her? Why should He punish her? Had she sinned? If so, in what way?

She knew that she had not sinned in loving Peter. She had realized what she was doing. She remembered the very words she had used to him.

Had anything happened to change her point of view? She had had her interval of happiness. What was she complaining of? Had it not been cheap at the price? If she were to be given the same opportunity all over again would she not take it? Would she elect to die an old maid?

No, she would not. Her interval had merely come to an end! She wanted more, that was all! It might have come to an end in any one of a dozen different ways. Why should she quarrel with her fate! Suppose Peter had died—she would have thanked God for their happiness. Ought she not to be infinitely more able to live out her life than if she had never met and loved him? Did she not know herself to be finer and better for her experience? No one could fail to be better for having loved any one as she had loved Peter! And how he had loved her! His love had enriched and ennobled her, would en-

rich and ennoble and glorify her whole life. Truly it was better to have loved and lost—no matter how—than never to have loved. Even if it were not, she must play the game—not sulk along the side-lines. No matter how black the night her soul remained unconquered! She was still the mistress of her fate.

How rich she was compared with what she had been on her thirty-ninth birthday! How much to be thankful for! Was she going to sit and let disappointment eat her heart up? Should she not rather try to give back to others some of the happiness that she had received? Of course she would! Buck up, old girl!

The lights were acting very queerly. Was something the matter with the electricity? She must not cave! "Buck up! Buck up!" There was a swelling in her throat. Her eyes were bursting. Oh, Peter! Peter! With the tears scalding her cheeks, Ursula threw herself upon the sofa and buried her face among the cushions.

The telephone in the hall uttered a shrill cry and she dragged herself to her feet. She would begin now——!

"'S me! Charles! Everything's fixed. Peter can't go with Gay. I don't know why, but anyhow you can have his seat. I say, you won't mind getting yourself over to the field, will you? Or, if you prefer, you can come here first and go with Gay. I guess you're right! The roads will be fierce! If I can spare time I'll bring you the ticket to-morrow, otherwise I'll mail it, and you can meet her in the grand-stand. I'm sorry Peter will miss the first match, but it's all to the good so far as you are concerned. Mighty glad you're back home again! Good-night!"

Ursula hung up the receiver. It was kind of Charles to take so much trouble! She must not disappoint him! This was her chance to be a sport.

CHAPTER XXVII

GAY, sitting on the veranda of "The Mews," pretending to read but in reality waiting for Peter, heard the scatter of gravel on the drive, and could not suppress a tiny flutter of her heart as she caught the flash of a white-silk shirt and saw Jimmy leap lightly off his pony. Could you love two men at the same time, she wondered, if you only loved one of them just a little?

"Hello, Gay!" he called, waving his helmet. "We've just finished practice—thought I'd drop over! Mind having this beast climb over your lawn? I'm only going to stay a minute."

"Of course not!" How nice of him to come over, only two days before the match! He looked tremendously brown and fit—trained fine but not too fine—as he walked over, leading the pony to where she sat in her wicker chair. "You look hard as nails. The work has done you good."

"That's right! In lots of ways."

He smiled, and she smiled back at him. Hitherto she had hated him when he was serious. Now she rather liked it.

"I think it's just great your making the team."

"I only hope I'll manage to stay on!"

"Sure, you will! Dad says you're a wiz."

The pony stretched its neck and took a step forward. This patch of white and pink looked so like a bunch of flowers—nice to eat.

"Comet likes you—too!"

Gay put out her hand and let the hairy lips nuzzle her palm.

"Ugh! He tickles!"

She laughed uneasily at the look in Jimmy's eyes.

"Gay!"

"Truthful James!"

"I had to see you just once before the game!"

"Why not? They say I'm easy to look at."

"Please don't kid me, Gay! I can't stand it. I don't blame you for letting my old man get your goat. Also I know I'm an importunate ass. I've tried to butt out and leave you alone. It's been the devil. I've thought of you every minute. Dammit, Gay! I've been in love with you for ten years now. I've never looked at any other girl—I've never kissed any other—I mean it! You probably won't believe me, but it's true. Sometimes I wish I had! It might have taken the curse off, somehow." He came a step nearer. Comet was cropping a remote geranium. "It hasn't prevented my making the team, Gay, but think what a kick it would put into my play if at the match, the day after to-morrow, I only knew I had a chance! God, I'd ride every one of those Englishmen right off the field! Can't you give me just one little word of encouragement, dear? Isn't there any hope for me at all?"

She did not answer.

"Gay—say there is!"

She shook her head. She was so sorry for him! Now that she knew more of human emotion, she could better appreciate the steadfastness and depth of his love.

"Why not?"

"I—I'm interested in somebody else."

"But simply because the favorite is a length or so ahead it doesn't mean there's no hope for the rest of the field. A poor old hundred-to-one shot sometimes wins. All I want is that chance."

Something warm slid down the side of her nose and fell on her hand.

"Where's my hanky? Got one?"

He handed her his and she used it vigorously.

"The point is—are you—actually engaged?"

Gay folded the handkerchief and held it out to him.

"I s'pose a lady would offer to have it washed, but it's too much trouble."

"Are you actually engaged?"

"Practically 'actually'."

"Humph! I don't mean 'maybe.' 'Sort of's' don't count!"

"Well, I am engaged, then!"

"I don't believe it!"

"You don't have to!"

"Even if you were, I'd stalk you to the altar, and hope old Thrum would drop of apoplexy before you got under the wire. Gay! Nobody will ever love you as I do! Give me something to wear in the game—any old thing—for a mascot!"

Comet was reaching 'round, sniffing something white beside her feet. She drew them under her.

"No, Jimmy! You mustn't ask me anything like that! You want me to play fair, don't you?"

"I want to go into the match like one of those old guys in the Middle Ages. I want a token!"

"Isn't my wanting you to win enough?"

"No!—All right! I've got one!"

He bent over and snatched something from under Comet's nose.

"Give it to me!"

"Not much!"

"Silly!"

"Goose!"

"Ass!"

"Harpy!"

"Devil!"

"Hell-cat!"

Gay grinned.

"Oh, Jimmy! You really are a nice boy!"

She never felt so thoroughly at home with anybody else—not even with Peter. Only why—Oh, why!—did Jimmy insist on trying to turn their happy companionship into something so different? If only he would not do that they could go on being just as good pals always, even after Peter and she were married. What a sense of security it would give her to feel that, no matter what, Jimmy would always be there!

"We are good friends, Gay—aren't we?"

"Leave it at that, then!"

"I can't!"

He leaned over suddenly and lifted her hand to his lips.

"It's no use pretending, dear!" he said. "With me it's all or nothing."

Peter, motoring down post-haste in answer to Gay's summons, rounded the corner of the house just in time to take in the tableau. It gave him no concern. The note in Gay's voice over the telephone had been unmistakable. Her answer was going to be "yes." He liked Jimmy Thorne, knew the boy had always been in love with Gay, and felt sincerely sorry for him. She was merely bidding him good-bye. He was even philosopher enough to recognize that they made a pretty picture, with the shadows stretching across the lawn—the girl in her pink dress lying in the wicker chair beside the mulberry-bush—the lean young polo player in his white breeches and riding-boots bending over her—the pony wandering with neglected rein—so that for an instant he

hesitated to disturb them. He was glad now that he would not have to take her out to Oxide, away from her family and her friends. It was the afternoon of the next day after the directors' meeting, and he was still dazed at his promotion. He remembered that Ursula had prophesied it for him, but he had not dared to hope for it—so soon, at any rate. They had even raised his salary to thirty thousand a year! And Gay was going to marry him! It was all too exciting and wonderful.

Gay, noticing Comet's uplifted head, followed the direction of his inquiry, and saw Peter standing there. This time the flutter of her heart was unmistakable.

"O—O—Calizona!" she cried, withdrawing her hand from Jimmy's reluctant clasp, and waving it at his approaching rival. "Here comes the acting president of the biggest copper company in existence. 'Kow-tow! Kow-tow! To the great Yen How!' Jimmy! Have you heard the news? They've made Peter ruler of the Empire of the East—at thirty thousand a year!"

Jimmy held out his hand.

"Congratulations, old man! That's great!"

Peter pumped his arm violently.

"Congratulations yourself! Mighty glad you made the team!"

"Thanks a lot."

Jimmy shifted his weight and looked from one to the other.

"Well! I must be off!" He made a scoop for the reins, caught them, and vaulted into the saddle.

"Won't you stay and have tea?" Gay's voice was politely cordial.

"No, thanks! 'Gainst the rules! Honestly, I have to go! Good-bye, Gay! S'long, McKay!"

"Well, if you must, Jimmy—! Good-bye!"

They watched while he trotted across the lawn to the drive, turned in the saddle and waved his helmet.

"That's a nice fellow!" said Peter generously, as the white spot bobbed down the road. "But I'm glad he's gone! What have you got to say to me, Gay?"

"Lots, Peter dearest!"

"Is everything—all right?"

She nodded violently.

"Then where are you going to say it? Not here, where everybody can—see us!"

"Anywhere you like. How about the den?"

But the thought of the den was not agreeable to Peter.

"Too many dead animals! Let's go down on the point."

"If you'd rather."

He helped her to her feet and stood looking down into excited eyes.

"You're sure everything *is* all right?"

"Absolutely! Peter, you didn't mind my being upset over what you told me last evening?"

He squeezed her hand.

"Not a particle. I'd have been surprised if you hadn't been—once you asked."

As they walked ankle deep through the shadows of the slope toward the beach, it came to him that it was just here that he had walked through the moonlight with Ursula that first evening.

"Do you think it queer that I did ask?"

"Not queer—only not very modern, perhaps."

"I guess no girl is so modern that she isn't a little bit sorry if she's not the first."

He could tell by her tightened lips that she had instantly regretted her words, but they hurt him none the less. If she was going to forgive, could she not also try

to forget? She saw the pain in his eyes and seized his arm impulsively.

"Oh, Peter! I'm a prig! I didn't mean to say that! I do love you so, Peter!"

They had reached the grove and were threading their way among the black basalt pillars of the pines. Peter slipped his arm about Gay's waist.

"And I love you, my darling! I'm just as sorry as you are—" The sentence died abruptly. Was he perfectly honest in saying that? He must be absolutely truthful with Gay. Was he sorry that he had loved Ursula? Was not whatever regret he felt due entirely to the manner of her leaving him? He felt Gay's fingers twine themselves into his.

"Here's where I came to find you that first evening! I sat against that trunk. And you there! Do you remember how red Mars was? You said it looked as if it was dripping blood! I'll make a confession. When I followed you down here I hoped you would kiss me! But I'm glad you didn't—now!"

"It's not too late!" he said, and with his kiss all doubts vanished.

"Gay!—My Gay!—My darling!"

She rested her head against his shoulder, and he held her tight and kissed her again—more violently—just as he had once kissed Ursula, dimly conscious that he was somehow reliving a former experience.

"Now sit down, Peter dear!" she cried, disengaging herself, "and I'll tell you all about it!"

She leaned against the biggest trunk, and he threw himself upon the pine-needles at her feet, holding her hand.

"All ready! How did you come to see your great light?"

Now that he was sure of her, he did not want her to make too much of something the importance of which she had always decried.

A shadow came between her brows.

"It did upset me, you know! It seemed so out of character, Peter! But I don't mind any longer."

He kissed her finger-tips.

"So I am forgiven?"

"It wasn't a case for forgiveness, Peter! I was just afraid somebody—or somebody's ghost—might come between us sometime."

Somebody's ghost! The phrase uttered in those precise surroundings had a peculiar effect upon him. Would the shadow of another woman forever slant across his happiness with Gay?

"I'm—glad you were able to bring yourself to look at it that way," he answered. "I think you're quite wonderful. Not every woman would have the courage——"

"Oh, don't give me all the credit! I'm afraid I might never have solved the problem by myself."

"You mean you asked somebody's advice!"

His tone did not conceal his uneasiness.

"Naturally. I had had no experience. I had to go to some one."

He dropped her hand and scrambled to his knees.

"You didn't mention any names?"

"Of course not—!" She changed expression. "What am I saying? Yes, I suppose I did—inferentially."

"You mean you disclosed to some other person what I had told you about myself?"

"Not that way, Peter!"

"What other way is there?"

"I had to explain how it came up—didn't I?—that I

thought of marrying and that the person I wanted to marry had lived with another woman."

"Yes—but you needn't have brought me into it!"

"Oh, Peter! I couldn't help it! I was so proud. Anyhow, Ursula took it for granted that it must be Jimmy Thorne, and I couldn't let her think that!"

"Ursula?"

"Yes—my Aunt Ursula! There wasn't anybody else to talk to. She's always been like a mother to me. I love her more than any other woman in the world."

"But she's in Europe."

"She got back yesterday. She was lonely, I guess. Anyhow, she decided to come home on the spur of the moment. And when I found out she was here I naturally went right to her and asked her what she thought I ought to do. You don't really mind, do you, Peter?"

Ursula back? Impossible! He tried to adjust himself to the idea. Could that be the reason why he had already thought of her twice that afternoon? Or was it merely because the place where they were sitting was so indelibly associated with their first meeting? Queer that he should have thought of her! He felt a curious giddiness, followed by an inexplicable excitement, a consuming thirst to know all about her.

"Where did you see her?" he asked.

"At the Farm—she went there directly from the steamer."

"How is she?"

"Fine! The trip must have done her a lot of good. She looked perfectly lovely, Peter!"

He glanced away from her across the Sound.

"What did she say—what did you tell her?"

Gay laughed.

"I hope you're not going to question the soundness of her advice!"

"Of course not! I'm just—interested. Please tell me exactly what she said."

"Well,"—Gay stirred with a finger among the needles beside her—"I told her I was terribly in love with a certain person and that he was in love with me, and how he was the most wonderful man I'd ever met. Oh, you don't want me to go all over that again, Peter!"

"Yes—go on!"

"I simply retailed our conversation of that evening."

"Did you tell her that I had been in love with another woman?"

"I said the man had—but that it was all over between them and that, anyhow, he had never loved her the way he did me. Your name didn't come in until afterward."

"Yes—all right."

"Then I told her I was afraid that maybe I might think about it afterward, and that it might come between us somehow—and asked her if she thought it would."

"And what did she say to that?"

Gay wrinkled her forehead.

"I don't remember exactly. I don't believe she expressed any opinion as to that. Anyhow, she advised me to marry you."

"What were her words?"

"She said that love usually came but once, and that I mustn't let any foolish idea stand between me and happiness—as *she* had. And then she burst out crying. I don't believe she's really happy, Peter. I think she must have done something once that she's regretted ever since. Maybe she refused to marry some one a long time ago—some one she found out afterward she was truly in love

with—when it was too late. You know every one has always wondered why she never married when she's so attractive—so perfectly beautiful!—and that would explain it."

"That was all she said?"

"She said that the only thing that mattered was whether we loved each other, and that if you really loved me better than any other woman in the world she advised me to marry you—only that I must be sure.—You do, don't you, Peter! Tell me once again that you love me better than any one else in the world!"

She leaned happily toward him, searching his eyes and holding out both her hands.

"You do, darling, don't you?" she repeated.

But to Peter the face turned in appeal toward him was no longer Gay's, but Ursula's, and it was Ursula's voice that he heard asking whether he still loved her. His beautiful, marvellous Ursula! Would the child beside him ever have been capable of such a sacrifice as Ursula had made! Too late! He was pledged in honor to Gay. He must go through with it—through with it!

Gay was staring at him with an expression of terror-stricken bewilderment.

"Peter!—You don't!—Oh, Peter!"

She buried her face in her lap, sobbing.

"Gay!" he protested, but his voice was unconvincing even to himself. "Dear little Gay!—Of course I love you! How can you doubt it?"

And he laid his hand on the quivering shingled head.

"No!—No! Not the way you must, Peter! You still love her! You thought you didn't, but all the time you did. You realize it now! And I must have felt it the other evening.—Oh, gosh!"

She climbed to her feet, dabbing her eyes with the backs of her hands.

"I'm sorry to make a scene! It's all perfectly simple. You love me, but you don't love me enough. You see that yourself! Sometime or other you'll go back to her. Good-bye, Peter dear!"

"Gay!" he choked.

But she was already gone.

CHAPTER XXVIII

URSULA awoke next morning to the swish and patter of rain against her window. Lying there in bed, the sound gave her the same sense of comfort and protection as in her stateroom on the *Paris*, and for a second or two she almost fancied herself still upon the ocean. Then the objects in the room aligned themselves in the gray light, and she realized where she was—back at "Folly Farm," back in her old life.

Her old life? Life was never the same. Everything within her vision gave her the keenest sense of continuity, but also of inevitable change—the china rabbit on the mantel, an Easter gift from her father when she was "a tiny"; the diminutive bamboo riding-crop hanging above the faded photograph of a self-conscious little girl in a tight-fitting dark habit, holding the crop in her gloved hand; the mounted trophy of her first fox-hunt, "Meadowbrook, Nov. 17, 1903"; the framed letter accompanying the decoration bestowed upon her by the French Government and placed in her hands by M. Jusserand himself; the incredibly grotesque purple-and-gilt vase bid in by Peter at the mock auction the first evening they had spent together on Broadway, and which she had insisted on keeping—each was a milestone in her life. Each marked some new phase in her development—having its own sorrows as well as joys. You had to suffer to grow. Her pony had died but she had learned to ride!

Could one get used to the ache in one's heart, so that one was not conscious of it? Was it true that as time went on one remembered only the happiness and not the

pain of past experiences? She got up and studied the face of the little girl in the riding-habit. What fun she had had with "Dixie"! She remembered how her father had encouraged her to ride. Yes, she had had fun! Yet she felt no present sorrow at the demise of the pony thirty years ago, although it had been the most poignant grief she had experienced up to that time. Thirty years? Could it be as long ago as that?

Would she some day be able to look back upon her friendship with Peter without suffering? Would she eventually remember only the joy of it? She looked out of the window. The rain was dragging gray veils across the valley. The entire landscape was obscured. How different from her birthday! That had been a mile-stone!

Sorrow and happiness were all mixed up together. You needed both, just as rain and sunshine were necessary to nature. Even if you wanted to, there was no such thing as going back to your old life. There was no old life and there was no going back. You had to go on—on—"no retreat." She would not run away. She would build a new life in which there should be sunlight—if not for herself, for others.

She had been dreading the thought of going to the polo and had hoped that the weather might compel a postponement, but, as if to justify her resolution, the rain stopped shortly after ten o'clock, and the sun burst through and turned the valley into a steaming golden crater. The mist dissolved and the hidden blue of the sky was mirrored in the standing pools upon the drive and beneath the dripping elms.

Gay telephoned over about noon that the field, although heavy, was not regarded as too wet, and that the match would be played. Her voice over the wire sounded pinched and cross.

"Is anything the matter?" asked Ursula.

"I've got a beastly head. I hardly slept any last night. I've been smoking too much!" Gay told her.

"Too much excitement, my dear. Are you sure you really want to go to the game?"

"No, not much, but I've got to, Ursula! I can't get out of it. The Ridgeways are coming to lunch and I'm taking them."

"What a shame!"

"Oh, I suppose I really do want to go—only I feel perfectly rotten."

Ursula was annoyed. What business had Gay to be out of sorts? She ought to be the happiest person in the world! Was she good enough for Peter?

"I'm sorry about your headache. Use a little Coué. You ought to be feeling very cheerful. it seems to me!"

Gay made no direct response.

"I'll meet you in the grand-stand," she said after a noticeable hesitation.

Already the motors were streaming along the main road toward Meadowbrook. Ursula could hear the gradually increasing hum of each as it approached, bursting into a roar as it emerged from behind the hill, and dying away into a mere pulse-beat—only to be succeeded by another. Car upon car! Why had she said that she would go to the game? Why should she subject herself to fatigue and annoyance when she did not care in the least who won? She could easily invent some excuse for not appearing there. Charles would not really care. He had merely wanted the pleasure of giving her pleasure. For a moment she was on the point of telephoning to Gay that she found herself unable to come. Was that playing the game? Of course, Charles would be disappointed if she did not go. She must follow through.

"You've absolutely got to follow through! I bet *you* do, Ursula!" Jimmy had said on that very spot.

She would follow through! At no matter what cost to her pride! So long as she did not have to meet Peter—just yet.

Had there been the remotest chance of that, she could not have gone. It would be months—years, perhaps—before she could bring herself to see him again.

"Hum-m-m-roar!"—"Hum-m-m-roar!" went the cars at the foot of the hill.

It was time to be starting if she wished to see the line-up. Could she face all that crowd of people? Suppose by some fluke she should run into Enid—and Blair! It was bad enough to have to see Gay!—Follow through! Be a sport!

She pressed the bell.

"Tell Curry to bring 'round the roadster!" she said to Nora.

In spite of the rainfall, a gridiron of dust already hung over the crowded Nassau County roads, and as Ursula neared Cochran Field she found herself jammed in a slowly moving procession of motors.

"Park your car! Park your car!"

A quarter of a mile ahead she could see the flags on the grand-stand streaming in the breeze. A soft haze tempered the glare of the afternoon sun. It was an ideal day for polo—almost like spring.

"Park your car! Park your car!"

People were abandoning their motors all about her, impatient lest they should miss the opening scrimmage. She saw Brookfield apparently stalled in a big Hispano-Suiza, and, pulling in ahead of him, she leaped out.

"For the love of Mike! Where did *you* come from?" he cried, grasping her by the arm and yanking her to a

safe place. "Gad, but I'm glad to see you! It's going to be a great day, after all. We must hump it if we expect to get there before the finish."

They hurried along the roadside, pushing their way through the crowd toward the entrance.

"Hang on to your ticket!"

Above the confusion about her she could hear the thud of hoofs and the cheers of the spectators. The match had begun. Her heart beat more rapidly. She could not escape the contagion of excitement.

"This way, Ursula!"

Brookfield squeezed her in front of him toward the turnstile.

"Tickets! Tickets!"

The gatekeeper snatched the cardboard from her hand, and the pressure was suddenly relaxed. With relief she found herself following Brookfield toward the grandstand. Eight white figures were cantering back toward the centre of the field from the further goal, Charles galloping on ahead with something in his hand. The Americans had just scored.

"What's the number of your box?—Seventeen? It's just over there! This usher will show you. I'm on the other side. Good-bye! See you soon!"

Behind her she heard the clatter of sticks, staccato shouts, the panting of the ponies.

"Thorne's got it!" cried some one.

She had forgotten until that moment that he had made the team. How excited Gay must be—would have been! —There she was! The usher handed her back her stub.

"Hello, Ursula!"

The girl certainly did not look well. She was pale, her eyes ringed like a small owl's. The two teams were cautiously milling around in the far corner of the field, which,

in spite of the wind, was slimy. Long streaks of black against the green showed where the ponies had slipped. Her guests were absorbed in their field-glasses. The smell of turf and of horses fused with that of freshly ironed muslin and perfume. Everywhere about her were people that she knew.

"I'm sorry you're so miserable!" she said.

"Oh, it's nothing! I'll be all right!"

"Are you feeling ill?"

A Britisher had fished the ball out of the mix-up and started in an almost leisurely manner toward his adversary's goal, clearly unwilling to take any chances on his pony's legs. Two Americans were racing after him. Everybody was watching to see how far he would get—not very far!

Gay drew Ursula down beside her.

"I'm not sick," she whispered. "I'm just—unhappy. I'm simply wretched!"

"What about? Has your mother——?"

"It's nothing to do with mother!"

The crowd was cheering wildly. The Englishman had promptly lost the ball. But to Ursula it meant less than nothing.

Gay not sick? It had nothing to do with Enid? Peter not there!—could it be——!

"Can't you guess? Don't you understand?"

Gay's mouth was drawn into a pitiful curve.

"You remember our talk, day before yesterday—?" she barely moved her lips—"about—you know who—well, he doesn't love me—as much—as that—other woman!"

"Goal!—*Goal!*—GOAL!"

The grand-stand became a bedlam of yelling fans. A fat man on the side-lines tried to turn a handspring, and,

failing, grabbed one of the trainers and did a fox-trot with him.

"Goal!—*Goal!*—GOAL!"

The teams came trotting back to the middle of the field, amid the shouts and applause of the spectators.

Ursula neither saw nor heard what was going on about her. Peter still loved her! He loved her! Loved her! Must not the joy she felt pouring into and distending her heart kill her? Could she stand it? Her left hand sought her breast, and coincidently the wave of her happiness broke and receded at the look of misery upon Gay's face. She knew so well from her own personal experience just how she must be feeling. Poor little girl! All the love she had for the child swelled into a counter wave, and rose to meet her joy. For an instant she forgot Peter as she laid her hand on that of her niece.

"Gay, darling! I'm so—I know how hard it is for you!"

Clatter of sticks, trample of hoofs, yells—crack! They were off again. The crowd was settling back into its seats. Two goals already! Gay gave her hand a squeeze and leaned forward valiantly to her guests.

"Ann, this is my Aunt Ursula—Mrs. Ridgeway—Mr. Ridgeway." Ursula bowed.

So that was why Peter was not in the box. Where was he? Somewhere in the throng? Her eyes scanned the grand-stands. Would he have come at all? His instinct would undoubtedly lead him to stay away lest he should meet Gay. What was he doing? He would not be at the office that afternoon. Might he not be already hurrying to "Folly Farm," or, learning through Charles that she was to be present at the game, have come—on the chance of seeing her? Were his field-glasses even now fixed upon her?

A whistle sounded. "Half-time!" The grooms ran out to take the horses. Two goals to nothing! The English were easy! The occupants of the boxes got up, stretched, greeted their acquaintances, and joined the procession passing in front of the royal box of those determined to be able to remark in later years: "Yes, he was really a very decent-looking sort of chap—not quite as distinguished as one had been led to suppose, but attractive—his grandfather's charm, you know."

They could have saved themselves the trouble, for, as Charles came cantering up the field, His Royal Highness left his seat, and, descending to the turf, sauntered to meet him.

Gay talked to her friends, while Ursula sat in a corner of the box in a daze of happiness. Was Peter there? If so, would he seek her out? No, he could not on account of Gay. What should she do? There was nothing to do —yet. Would he come to her, after the way she had treated him in Paris, without some sign from her?

A white figure was mounting toward the box—Charles.

"Hello, Ann! Howd'y, Tom! Glad to see you looking so much better, Ursula! You staged a quick come-back. Yes, it looks like a walkover! As I told you in Paris, their mounts don't compare with ours. Jimmy is playing like a fiend. He nearly scored a third goal. Yes, he made both the others. He's improving every minute, but he shouldn't be quite so reckless! By the way"—Charles lowered his voice and drew her to one side—"there's nothing in that business I mentioned the other afternoon. Get me?" He nodded toward Gay. "Whatever there was—it's all off, anyhow. That's why Peter isn't sitting here, I gather."

He glanced at his wrist-watch.

"I'm sorry! I wouldn't have minded having McKay

for a son-in-law. I saw him a few minutes ago—on the other side. He asked after you. I told him you had his seat and he said he might— Hello! Only three minutes! I must get along! I think he'll probably try and find you—after the game."

So Peter was just across the field. She might have known that he would not have stayed away, once he learned that she was to be there. Why had she ever doubted that, in the end, a love as overpowering as theirs would have brought him back to her? Spring—autumn! She had harvested her love. She could give him far more now than she had then. After all, autumn was more wonderful than spring with all its promise! With a serene sense that all was well she stood up, so that Peter, if he were looking, could see her.

The whistle shrilled again, and the white ball bounded among the bandaged ankles of the ponies. Mallet rattled against mallet. It seemed as if everything were hanging fire. Why didn't somebody get the ball? Somebody had!

One of the Americans on a black pony had reached into the scrimmage, fished out the ball, and was driving it ahead of him toward the English goal.

"Thorne!—Thorne!—Goal!—Goal!!"

Suddenly the whistle.

Ursula felt Gay's hand grip her wrist. Silence fell upon the grand-stands. The players were riding in circles around a motionless spot of white, trying to pull in their ponies. The black was on its haunches, struggling to its feet. The English captain leaped down, bent over Thorne, and beckoned.

They had all dismounted by this time, and were grouped about the fallen player. A groom was chasing Jimmy's pony. A young man with a black bag, followed by a trainer carrying a pail of water, started run-

ning across the field. Ursula heard Gay utter a suppressed cry, felt her push past, and saw her hurry down the steps.

The doctor had torn open Jimmy's shirt, and was feeling his neck and shoulders. Gay threw herself on her knees beside the chalk-like, expressionless face.

"It's just his collar-bone. Give me that sponge, please."

The doctor dipped the sponge in the pail, wiped the mud from the boy's forehead, squeezed the water over his face, and fanned him with a towel. A faint tinge of color appeared on the wet cheeks and the eyelids moved slightly.

"He'll be all right in a minute," said the doctor. "Will you gentlemen give me a little more room, please?"

The patient sighed, sputtered, and opened his eyes. The crowd had increased and the players, seeing that the situation was not serious, had turned and were driving them back.

"Jimmy!" cried Gay, and her face was as white as his. "Jimmy! Are you badly hurt?"

He stared at her uncomprehendingly.

"Jimmy! Don't you know me? It's me! Gay!"

He shivered and a spasm of pain twisted his features.

"Jimmy!" she cried. "Jimmy, dearest!"

He recognized her, and his expression of agony changed to one of bewildered pleasure. His lips moved and she bent her head.

"Am I—*really—that?*"

"Yes! Yes!" she assured him. "And I knew it all the time—down underneath—sort of."

The doctor interrupted further explanation by a touch on her shoulder.

"Excuse us, please. We've got to put this young man

on a stretcher. He's out of the game for to-day. You can come along as nurse—unless the patient objects."

Ursula, from where she stood in the box, watched the little cortège as it accompanied the fallen hero toward the club-house. The American substitute was already warming up, and the ushers were begging the spectators to return to their seats and ordering the more insistent off the turf.

"Get off the field! Back there!"

But there was one who, in defiance of all authority, held steadily on his way toward the opposite stand, oblivious to the epithets hurled in his direction as he pushed his way through the crowd. Then he saw Ursula, and leaped up the stairs just as the whistle blew.

"Ursula! Where have you been?"

She saw only his eyes, as his hands seized hers in a grip so tense that it seemed as if they would never let them go. She did not want to withdraw them.

"Here—I am, Peter!" she said.

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